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G. S. Banhatti

LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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G.S. BANHATTI

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20. *Six Lessons on Raja-Yoga*
(SLRY), V Edition 1957
21. *Hindu View of Life* by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. (HVL)
22. *The Complete Works in eight volumes.*
(Mayavati Edition)

Abbreviations in the brackets have been used in the text and footnotes. Titles not followed by the names of authors belong to books by Swami Vivekananda.

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CALENDAR OF VIVEKANANDA'S LIFE

January 12,	1863	Birth at Calcutta.
	1871	Entrance in Metropolitan Institute, Calcutta.
	1877	Departure for Raipur with father and family.
	1879	Return to Calcutta. Passes Entrance Examination. Admitted to Presidency College, Calcutta.
	1881	First meeting with Ramakrishna.
	1884	Passes B.A. examination.
	1884	Death of father.
August 16,	1886	Death of Ramakrishna.
	1886	Baranagar Math set up.
	1888	Journey to Varanasi, Vrindavan, Hathras.
December	1888	Return to Baranagar Math, Calcutta.
December	1889	Journey to Varanasi, Ghazipur. (Meeting with Pavhari Baba)
	1890	Return to Calcutta.
July	1890	Journey to Bhagalpur, Vaidyanath, Almora, Hrishikesh. Illness and Convalescence at Meerut.
January	1891	Journey to Delhi.

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February	1891	Journey to Alwar, Jaipur, Khetri, (Meeting with Maharaja Ajit Singh) Ahmedabad, Junagadh, other places in Gujrat, Khandwa.
July	1892	Journey to Bombay, Poona (Stay with Tilak), Belgaum, Goa, Bangalore, Trivandrum, Ramnad (Meeting with Raja Bhaskara Setupati), Kanya Kumari, Meditation at 'Vivekananda Rock'. Journey to Madras (Meeting with Alasinga Perumal) Hyderabad, Khetri.
May 31,	1893	Departure from Bombay.
September 11,	1893	Parliament of Religions at Chicago opens. Vivekananda's epoch-making speech.
September to December	1893	Lecture Tour in the U.S.
January, February	1894	Lectures at Detroit.
March-May	1894	Lectures at Chicago, New York, Boston, etc.
June	1894	Chicago.
July-August	1894	Greenacre (New England).
September-October	1894	Baltimore, Washington.
November	1894	New York.
December	1894	Regular lectures at Brooklyn.
February to June	1895	Classes in New York, *Raja-Yoga* dictated to Miss Waldo.
June to August 6,	1895	Classes at Thousand Islands Park.
October	1895	Visit to England and Lectures in London.
December 6,	1895	Return to New York. Meeting with J.J. Goodwin.
February	1896	Vedanta Society of New York founded.

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April 15,	1896	Departure from New York. Lectures in London. Nivedita, Sturdy, the Seviers become disciples. Meeting with Max Muller.
July	1896	Tour of Europe. Meeting with Deussen. Return to England.
December 16,	1896	Departure for Europe and India.
January 26,	1897	Arrival at Pamban (India). Receptions at Ramnad, Madras, etc.
February 28,	1897	Reception at Calcutta.
May 1,	1897	Ramakrishna Mission founded.
May	1897	Journey to Lucknow and Almora.
August 12,	1897	Arrives at Ambala via Barelly. Journey to Rawalpindi, Murree, Jammu, Srinagar. (Meeting with Ramatirtha).
January	1898	Return to Calcutta.
March	1898	Nivedita's work begins.
May 11,	1898	Journey to Almora, Amarnath.
	1899	Return to Calcutta. Ramakrishna Math founded. Consolidation.
June 20,	1899	Departure from Calcutta.
July 31,	1899	Arrival in London.
August 26,	1899	Departure for America. Rest in America.
November 10,	1899	Lectures in New York, Chicago.
December	1899	Sojourn in California.
April	1900	Return to New York.
July 20,	1900	Departure for Paris.
August	1900	Sojourn in Paris. Congress of History of Religions.
October 24,	1900	Departure from Paris, Tour of Egypt, Turkey, etc.
December 9,	1900	Arrival at Belur Math, India.

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January 3,	1901	Arrival at Mayavati, Almora.
January 24,	1901	Back to Belur Math.
March 18,	1901	Departure for Dacca.
October	1901	Journey to Assam. Attack of Asthma & Diabetes.
December	1901	Indian National Congress meets at Calcutta. Meeting with Tilak and other leaders.
December	1901	Journey to Gaya & Varanasi, Serious attack of Asthma and Diabetes.
July 4,	1902	Passes away.

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1

CHILDHOOD & EARLY SCHOOL-LIFE

GREATNESS instinctively commands universal respect. Circumstances and position make persons great; on the other hand, great persons lend sanctity to the positions they occupy. The greatest souls are however immortalized by their innate distilled essence which trickles down history for countless years; their positions and rewards in lifetime sink into insignificance as time passes and their eternal imprint centred in a hallowed aura emerges on the horizon of human memory to remain there like a star. From time to time eager telescopes may be focussed at these stars, and their lustre analysed and meaningfully utilized lest it become too vague and remote.

Narendra Nath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda, saw the light of day on Monday, January 12, 1863. The Dattas were a *Kayastha* (*Kshatriya*) family, and showed it. Vivekananda was often referred to as a "Warrior Monk," and he unmistakably exhibited the predominantly Kshatriya characteristics mentioned in the Gita (18/43)—

> Valour, skill, glory, fortitude,
> Not flying from the field of war,
> And charity and sovereign power,
> Are Kshatriya's natural duties.

Narendra's grandfather Durga Charan had renounced the world at the age of twenty five. Vishwanath, Durga Charan's

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only son, lived in the ancestral house in the northern part of Calcutta. Vishwanath himself earned in plenty, being a flourishing lawyer's assistant but was generous to a fault. Once when Narendra protested against his charity bestowed on persons without discrimination, Vishwanath told him, "How can you understand the great misery of human life? When you realise it, you will sympathise with the poor creatures who try to forget their sorrows in the momentary oblivion obtained through intoxicants." Later, to Haripada Mitra's question on bad effects of petty charity Vivekananda replied, echoing this, "Why should you worry your head about what a beggar does with a pice or two you give him? Suppose he spends the trifle in hemp, that affects him only; but when he resorts to stealing or something worse it affects the whole society." On another occasion, when Vishwanath was more recklessly extravagant than usual, his youthful son demanded, "Father, what are you going to leave me?" "Go and stand before the mirror," was the cool reply, "and you will see what I leave you." In addition to generosity Narendra inherited his sonorous voice and love of music from his father.

Naren's mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi influenced him profoundly. He inherited his regal bearing, his exceptional memory and his unbounded love for humanity from her. Vivekananda's passionate adoration of his mother was beyond words. Later, in 1894, he delivered a stirring address at Boston on "The Ideals of Indian Women," which he concluded with a deep and touching homage to his mother. The approaching Christmas and the "child" Vivekananda, ringing in unison, made an inexpressible impression on the minds of the ladies present, and they sent to his aged mother a lovely picture of the child Jesus and Virgin Mary with a letter recognising "your life and work in and through your son." Vivekananda always acknowledged the great heritage of his mother's exemplary self-control and unabashed horror of sin.

As Naren, however, he was not always a smooth bogey to drive. Unable to control the naughty child the mother used to remark helplessly, "I prayed to *Shiva* for a son, and he has sent me one of his demons." Like the exploits in childhood of many a great man, Naren's activities as a child were

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unmistakable pointers to his future inclinations. His emotional fits could be calmed down by threatening him that Shiva would not accept him if he did not behave. The sight of a monk would stir him to the foundation of his being, and meditation was his favourite game. His playmates often joined him in this game. Once when he was absorbed in meditation, a cobra appeared and all the boys ran away. On being asked afterwards whether he did not see the reptile he answered, "I did not. I was feeling inexpressible bliss."

Glimpses of his superb intellectual gifts can be seen even at this age. A peep in his exquisite conscientiousness is afforded by his giving up the worship of *Sita-Rama* on hearing from an elderly person that marriage was a hurdle in spiritual progress. And having discarded *Rama*, a "married god," he installed *Shiva*, thinking He was unmarried ! Another incident which shows his thirst for uncompromising rationality is worth recalling. His father's visitors were drawn from several castes, and separate tobacco pipes—a mark of hospitality—were provided for each caste. Failing to get a rational solution of what would happen if men of different castes puffed from the same pipe, he decided to experiment for himself, and took a puff each from all the pipes, and lo, nothing untoward happened except that he was rebuked! Possibly at this early age he concluded that these restrictions were figments of man's imagination.

His prodigious memory made its mark even before he entered school. His private tutor once rebuked him for sitting with eyes closed when the lesson was being taught, and Naren, to his astonishment, reproduced the entire lesson. He knew by heart long passages in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and at the age of seven corrected the errors made by wandering minstrels. His interest in science and technology was roused in childhood, and he constructed toy machinery of various types.

His love of truth and strength of character were phenomenal even in childhood. Once when in a class he was talking to his mates, the teacher asked them all questions to test their attention. None but Naren could answer the questions and all but he were asked to stand up. Naren stood up, too, explaining that he was the culprit and deserved punishment. Fearless

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courage and defiance of brutality were his second nature. One day when a teacher started beating a classmate, Naren laughed out of sheer exhaustion. The teacher turned to him and pulled his ears. "Don't pull my ears," cried the boy, tears streaming from his eyes, "Take care not to touch me again." He poured out this righteous indignation before the head of the school, the famed Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who took steps to avoid recurrence of such incidents.

Naren was thus Vivekananda in miniature. Every characteristic feature of the Swami's life could be observed in Naren's life, even like the sun visible in a tiny water drop. In 1871 he was enrolled in the famous Metropolitan Institute of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. He studied there till 1877, in which year his father went to Raipur in present Madhya Pradesh. In 1879 the family returned to Calcutta and in the same year Naren passed the Entrance Examination in the first division, being the only student of his school to be so distinguished. He received a watch as a present from his father for this attainment. Due to his absence at Raipur for two years he was required to master three years' studies in one year; as a special case he was granted permission to do so. His precocious intellect made an easy job of it. He had not read a single word of Geometry till the eleventh hour, and, as he himself relates, he "began to study the subject keeping awake for the whole night and in the course of twentyfour hours mastered the four books of Geometry." It was at this early age that he could grasp the contents of a paragraph by reading its first and last lines. This miraculous power later developed into his amazing intellectual capacity enabling him to digest large volumes in a matter of hours; this intellectual capacity proclaims him a glorious descendant of such Himalayan intellectuals of India as *Shankaracharya* and *Jnaneshwar*. Indeed it was only in the fitness of things, for otherwise how could he be almost omniscient at the early age of twenty nine?

During his journey from Calcutta to Raipur, Naren got his first glimpses of natural beauty. In 1877, there was no railway to Raipur, and the family had to undertake an arduous journey in a bullock cart via Allahabad and Jabalpur. Naren gazed

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intently upon the dense forests, hills and rills and drank deep of the nectar of lofty nature.

In later life, Vivekananda described these moments as some of his happiest. These experiences were the a b c of his spiritual training. In his ascent therefrom to the dizzy heights of spiritual knowledge we not only read the development of one individual; we see in a nutshell, the history of the entire spiritual progress man has attained.

In 1879, with Naren's passing the Entrance Examination ended the prologue to the epic of Swami Vivekananda's life.

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2

SPIRITUAL APPRENTICESHIP

DURING Naren's studentship in the First Year Arts class in 1881, he had a nervous breakdown, and went to Gaya for a change. Consequently he passed his examination in the second division. Curricular studies could never quench his ever increasing thirst for knowledge; indeed curriculum and examination attracted his attention last. He had not read a single page of Green's book on English History till three days prior to the B.A. examination, which he passed in 1884. Even on the morning of the examination day he sang till nine o'clock and had to be reminded of the examination. His intuitive curriculum was uppermost in his mind and harnessed all his intellectual might. He read several books on Western Logic and World history and civilization during these years. Philosophy was his natural liking and he feverishly digested Herbert Spencer whose influence can be felt in the disarming argument Vivekananda later advanced. He also studied Kant, Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill, Augueste Comte, Hegel and Darwin. By delving deep into these modern stalwarts of science and philosophy, he imbibed a stern scientific attitude and an uncompromising respect for human intellect. He is said to have offered, in a letter to Herbert Spencer, some criticism on the celebrated philosopher's speculations, which the

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aged stalwart is said to have appreciated. He later subjected the realisations of Sri Ramakrishna himself to scientific tests.

Due to his innumerable gifts Naren was eagerly loved and sought after by his companions. No programme was complete without his songs, stories and fun. His talent as a story-teller and a jovial conversationalist which later charmed thousands was already felt in his college days. The remark of a class-mate that "he was an average student with no promise of brilliance because he was not destined to win any prize of the learned or unlearned professions"[1] seems to concentrate on the formal performance of Narendra in his college life. For, Principal W. W. Hastie said of him, "Narendra is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German Universities, among philosophical students. He is bound to make his mark in life."[2] A friend of Naren says, "It was delightful to listen to him. His voice was like music to us. We would often open a subject for discussion just for the pleasure of hearing him speak. He was interesting, and, above all, so original." Another illustrious intellectual, Brajendra Nath Seal, a class-mate of Naren, describes him as "a gifted youth, sociable, free and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, a brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with the shafts of a keen with the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under the garb of cynicism; altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will."[3]

His resolve not to marry was the perceptible outcome of his stern idea of purity. Even before he appeared for the B.A. examination, offers for marriage poured in. An alluring proposal of a dowry enough to finance his education in England leading to the I.C.S. examination was summarily rejected by him. Indeed Vivekananda was to visit England for another purpose to educate Englishmen. Marriage and he remained at loggerheads for some time and eventually, marriage announced a complete surrender.

1. Rem. p. 3.
2. LM p. 26.
3. LEW p. 75.

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He told his married friend, "You are married. You are under the bondage. I am free. Mine will be the monastic life I am sure."[4] Sometimes, it appeared as if marriage was round the corner, but finally it had to retreat in the face of adverse circumstances. After his college days were over, Naren's father settled a rich match for him, but before anything could be done the father passed away. At this time Naren was under the strong influence of Sri Ramakrishna. His mother and grandmother apprehended his vow to renounce, and tried to force him into another match which was settled by them, but some petty differences arose and it was broken.

Like several impressionable youths of his day, Naren came under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj led at the time by the famed Keshab Chandra Sen, and Debendra Nath Tagore (father of the poet). He attended the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj and often led the chorus. As it transpired later he was now slowly moving through his enormous stock of knowledge towards the question which marked the real beginning of his intellectual quest for God. In 1881, he asked Debendra Nath Tagore his famous question, "Have you seen God?" and got no reply. The remark which Debendra Nath made was however not the less searching; he told Naren, "My boy, you have the *Yogi's* eyes."

After failing in several quarters to elicit an answer, Naren turned to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and got the historic answer, "Yes, I see Him as I see you, only in an infinitely intenser sense." The questioner became spellbound, and the spell never ended. This apparently simple catechism meant a tremendous leap forward in Naren's search for truth. It was a soothing balm to his agitated nerves. Search for the direction was now over; traversing the path remained. It was a moment of great revelation in spiritual science like that of Newton's vision of gravitation in physical science. This famous question and the equally famous answer are unsurpassed in their sublime beauty. They speak volumes to a devotee and suggest a spiritual relationship too sacred for words. Their disarming succinctness, cool

4. LEW p. 75.

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confidence, transparent clarity and sincerity are bound to raise waves of noble grandeur in every heart.

Poetry was the medium of Naren's first introduction in absentia to Sri Ramakrishna. While teaching Wordsworth's 'Excursion', Naren's teacher, Principal Hastie, remarked that he had known only one person who had experienced the spiritual vision described by the poet, and that person was Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineshwar. In 1881, Naren was personally introduced to Ramakrishna at the residence of a devotee, Surendra Nath Mitra. On the occasion, Naren sang, and Ramakrishna was greatly attracted towards him. Later in his search for a convincing answer to his question, Naren went to Sri Ramakrishna.

The spiritual apprenticeship Naren underwent at the feet of Ramakrishna was remarkable for its variegated experiences. In the beginning the teacher earnestly sought the taught, but the taught was almost defiant. For Naren had only heard the answer he wanted, he was far from being convinced. Only a *Prima facie* case had, as it were, been established. Ramakrishna saw the potentialities of his young visitor. He was always benign, loving. He pronounced Naren "a thousand-petalled lotus", and asked him whether he saw a light before falling asleep. On getting an affirmative reply, he cried, "This one is an adept in meditation from his very birth." While speaking to Naren, he was always stirred deeply and poured out his whole being through his words. He had periods of intense spiritual ecstasy in which he was lost to the outside world; doctors testified that even his pulse stopped beating during these periods which sometimes lasted for hours. He would feed Naren and treated him with overflowing tenderness as a mother treats her child.

For a long time, however, Naren remained a staunch intellectual, a sceptic. He subjected each and every assertion of the Master to severe cross-examination. As a Brahmo, Naren had no belief in image-worship and once when Ramakrishna asked him not to criticize *Kali*-worship, he replied, "Must I accept her because I come here?" The Master prophesied, "All right, before long you shall not only accept her but weep in her name." Naren could not reason out many sayings and actions of Ramakrishna and rebelled. At last it was the burning

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renunciation of the teacher which melted the ice of his cold and stubborn rationality.

The first experience which defied Naren's uncompromising rationalism was that of Ramakrishna's putting his right foot over Naren's body. The ritual sounds peculiar but it resulted in an unprecedented upheaval in Naren's orderly brain. A first personal narrative will serve the purpose best here: "With my eyes opened I saw that the walls, and everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into night, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void."[5] "What is that you are doing to me? I have my parents' was Naren's anxious wail. After a time he regained normal consciousness. However much he stretched his reasoning powers, he could not account for this extraordinary experience. In his intellectual pride he however decided to guard against a repetition of the incident. "Next time it won't be that easy," he possibly murmured and felt reassured. But his confidence proved of no avail. A few days passed, and he found losing his consciousness at the touch of the Master, himself in one of his superb trances.

By and bye, Naren began to return the deep love of the Master. Once when Ramakrishna asked him why he came there if he did not believe in his thoughts, Naren told him that agreement with Ramakrishna was not a condition precedent to anybody's visiting him, and he came to Ramakrishna because he loved him.

Another severe blow to Naren's intellectual pride came when he was told that Ramakrishna did not accept presents from impure men and on careful investigation Naren realised that Ramakrishna's sifting of his visitors was accurate in every case. This power could not be argued out. He was lost in wonder and admiration. The Master told him, "A man develops subtle power as a result of strict observance of the vows of celibacy for twelve years. Then he can understand and grasp very subtle things which otherwise elude his intellect. Through that understanding the aspirant can get revelation of God."

5. LEW p. 48.

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Every day that dawned was tearing the veil of scepticism and adding to Naren's faith in Ramakrishna. The Master never told the disciple to believe in him. In fact, he asked him to test him searchingly. The unbounded faith Naren finally came to place in Ramakrishna therefore *evolved* out of his intellectual strength, and did not *deny* it. The final stage in Naren's spiritual apprenticeship was reached when Naren threw in his lot with the Master's, gratefully placing in him the fullest trust.

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3

REALISATION

THE OVERPOWERING love of Ramakrishna for Naren was at first an effective agent in harnessing all the energy of the disciple to the cause of seeing God. Naren's presence in his vicinity gave Ramakrishna moments of great ecstasy.

The teaching of the Master was refreshingly original in its contents as well as its method. Vivekananda says, "I had a curious education; I loved the man, but I hated all his ideas."[1] Through love of the teacher, light entered the brain and ideas were assimilated. The cut-and-dry approach of intellectual rationalism which, on deciding upon one idea as true, loses no time in branding the other as untrue, was termed fanaticism by Ramakrishna. "Try to see the truth from all angles" was his advice. "You may not accept the views of the seers, but how can you abuse them, or limit God's infinitude?" was his question to all fanatics. And the power which informed these sayings was the radiant purity of character, fearless and unassuming. Such power is its own sanction; it does not need any other credentials. It is this power that enabled Ramakrishna admonish a rich visitor, "People call you Raja. But I cannot do so. That will be a lie on my part." When Vivekananda says later, "Of all the worries I have ever had, the greatest has been the care of

1. Rem. p. 273.

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this money", we are conscious of his Guru speaking through him. Mrs. Wright remarks, "His horrified reluctance to take money haunted us."[2] Ramakrishna's teaching permeated the whole being of his disciples. Curious education indeed, judging from what generally passes for education today!

Naren's effort to attain freedom were nothing short of heroic. Spiritual geniuses in India have been known for seething in pain under the bondage of the body and the world; for a passion for their freedom, ever fresh, ardent and untiring informs their being. Among them, as Romain Rolland avers, "there are few examples so striking as the personality of Vivekananda."[3] Nothing could tempt him on his way to knowledge. Like *Nachiketas* of the *Upanishad* he calmly ignored everything leading him astray. When Ramakrishna offered to impart him yogic powers, Naren asked, "Will these help me to realise God?" Ramakrishna replied in the negative, but assured that they would be helpful in doing God's work after realising God. Naren said, "I do not want them. Let me realise God first! Then I shall know whether I want them or not."

It was no wonder therefore that Naren could emerge triumphant out of the various wordly difficulties trying to distract him. Early in 1884 his father suddenly died, and a pageant of severe hardships passed before him making ugly gestures. Adversity however sharpened his abilities, brightened the lustre of his qualities and brought forth his mettle. A variety of debts was the only property Naren inherited. Relatives led the army of enemies. They tried to oust the family from the house. The boy who was in blissful ignorance of the ways of the world was forced to maintain a large family. A meal a day became a luxury. Naren would return late and refuse to eat on the pretext that he had eaten at his friend's. A legal dispute arose regarding the ownership of the house. Verily, this period was the darkest in his life. His own description of these hard days makes tearful reading: "This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor and the destitute." . . .

2. LEW p. 411.
3. LVR p. 203.

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Once when a song praising the graces of God was being sung in his presence, he cried in anguish, "Will you please stop the song? Such fancies may be pleasing to those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and have no starving relatives at home." His pride never allowed him to parade his sufferings. He has recorded that "only one of my friends came to know about my poverty without my knowledge, and sent anonymous help to my mother by which act of kindness he has put me under a deep debt of gratitude." True to Bhartrihari's description of a large-hearted man, he conceived as mountains the atom-sized virtues of others. "Various temptations came my way; a rich woman sent me an ugly proposal to end my days of penury which I rejected with scorn," he relates.

These hardships sometimes had a telling effect on Naren's sensitive mind. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's words, "If God is good and gracious, why do millions die for want of a few morsels of food?" rang in his ears with bitter irony. He tried his hand at various jobs. The following description of Naren as a Head Master refers to these days and is interesting: "When I was a student in the Metropolitan School, Bow Bazar Branch, I saw Swamiji, who was then headmaster of that school for a few weeks. I belonged to a lower grade and did not have the privilege and pleasure of hearing him teach our class. But I used to watch him from our class-room window almost every day as he entered the school compound. I still vividly remember the scene. He was clothed in trousers and a long coat with a white scarf about six feet long around his shoulders. In one hand he carried an umbrella and in the other a book, most probably the text book of the Entrance class. With sparkling eyes and smiling face he looked so indrawn that some would be attracted to him for charming personality, and some would not dare approach him for his extreme gravity and solemnity. It was not however until I came to the Baranagore Math that I knew that the great headmaster who impressed me so much was Swamiji himself."[4] So here is the unostantatious Gangotri of the Ganga of Vivekananda's teaching broadcast later to the world.

4. *Rem. p. 311.*

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The trials of Naren in this period were not confined to the outer world. The turbulent waves of natural physical urges were also to be conquered. Naren resisted them tooth and nail and came out victorious. It is touching to hear him say: "Once in me rose the feeling of lust. I got so disgusted with myself that I sat on a pot of burning cindars, and it took a long time for the wound to heal."[5] Inumerable threads went to weave the superb texture of this great personality!

When visions of God at last dawned upon Naren, he was swept off the sands of physical consciousness. With the oriental realisation of the Almighty there is no holding the scales even between one's individuality and the all-pervading spiritual essence; it is surrender and plunging in, complete and headlong. In this right royal tradition Vivekananda "came like one dripping wet from a dip in the occan, and when he said words to the effect, 'come on in; the water's fine' the people of India and the world responded."[6]

Words cannot do justice to this state of realisation, the state of indefinable bliss according to every blessed soul who has experienced it. From the various accounts a description of that is attempted here. From Vivekananda's own assertion, "I lost all natural consciousness". It is patent that the loss of awareness of the body is a necessary part of this state. Romain Rolland remarks that "a higher consciousness, that of the inner world," is in this state most keenly perceptive. He compares Vivekananda's realisation with that of St. Theresa. Indeed from Vivekananda's descriptions his spiritual realisations seem to be as real as our everyday perceptions. He says of one such occasion, "The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God. I saw it quite clearly but kept silent, to see if the idea would last. But the impression did not abate in the course of the day. All the while, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience and felt myself always in a sort of comatose state. While walking in the streets, I noticed cabs

5. Rem. p. 333.
6. WVM p. 168.

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plying, but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt the cabs and myself were of one stuff . . . . . when I became normal again. I realised that I must have a glimpse of the *Advaita* state . . Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the *Advaita* philosophy".[7] Let it be remembered that these words come from the most sceptical of all rationals who never accepted even his revered teacher's word without testing its truth.

Now Vivekananda was on the threshold of his mission in this world. He was not destined to remain absorbed in *samadhi*; he was moulded for the thick and thin of this world. Ramakrishna had traced out his path for him. "When young Naren importuned him to open to him the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute, Ramakrishna refused with anger. 'Shame on you!' he cried, 'I thought you were to be the great Bunyan tree giving shelter to thousands of tired souls . . . Let these little things alone, my child. How can you be satisfied with so one-sided an ideal?' Naren wept, humiliated and heart-broken with the duty of renunciation. He acknowledged that the Master's severity was just, but to the end of his life he carried a longing in his heart for the abysmal God, although he devoted that life with humility, hardihood, and courage to the service of man".

The spiritual ideal of Vivekananda thus assumed social proportions. This is a very important aspect of his life and work which made it as much a fountain of inspiration for a soul thirsting for God as an enthusing object-lesson for one who has never tasted spirituality. Intensely spiritual, his life-work buzzes with activity and dives deep into everyday life at various points.

Naren could live in close contact with Ramakrishna only for five years. The sublime sweetness of this sweet association is beyond words. In 1885 Ramakrishna contracted the throat-trouble which finally, in the form of cancer, ended his mortal form. In order to benefit by a change of weather, a garden in Cossipore was hired on Rupees eighty a month where he was

7. LEW p. 65.

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taken in December, 1885. But it was only a retreat that the disease staged; it returned soon with a vengeance. Refusal of the sage to rest and his constant flights into samadhi helped the situation to worsen. Though suffering from acute pain, Ramakrishna dismissed it saying, "Let the body and the pain take care of each other; thou, oh my mind, be always in bliss". Barely a couple of days before his passing away the Master called Naren, and seating him before himself, entered into a deep samadhi. Naren felt as if a subtle, impeccable force was enveloping his being, and piercing into it. Finally, Ramakrishna returned to the normal state, and told him, "Today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that you will go to whence you came".

The Master passed away on 16th August, 1886, and a great chapter in the life of Naren ended.

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4

THE VISION OF ONE INDIA

NOW COMMENCES a new epoch in the life of Swami Vivekananda. The obscure disciple of Ramakrishna, who himself was known only to some thousands, though among them were great men in the West like MaxMuller, becomes known in several corners of the country, and finally shoots into the limelight in 1893. His teacher has receded, and vast and various India herself now teaches him. A period of peripatetic education now unfolds itself. He takes early lessons in leadership at the Baranagar Math and ultimately emerges a universal leader.

With Ramakrishna's death the cohesive force had departed, and many of his disciples returned home and were inclined towards the ordinary householder's life. Surendra Nath Mitra however graciously continued to pay for the expenses of the Cossipore Garden. Shortly, another house at Baranagar was hired for Rs. 10/- a month. Now the first task that fell to Naren's lot was that of bringing the scattered disciples together and let the world know that Ramakrishna continued to live in the form of the disciples. Fortunately the family disputes, including a legal one, ended in his favour, and he freely adopted the life of a monk. The Master himself had feelingly told all, "I leave you in Naren's charge." He became the natural leader and echoed the Master's message: "Let man-making be our *Sadhana* (religious practice). Realise God through service of man." Till 1889 he lived at the *Math*. The days were occupied with reading,

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discussion, meditation, walking exercises and doing the household work for themselves. Vivekananda would work for twenty hours, rising at 4 a. m. and going to bed at midnight. The spiritual atmosphere at the Math was pious and inspiring reminding the visitors of an ashrama (a centre of spiritual learning) of yore.

In 1888 he made up his mind to travel through India and learn by experience. He was not an easy-chair patriot, he yearned to look deep into the image of the Motherland which he worshipped. He went to Varanasi in 1888 and intently gazed at the spot where *Buddha* and *Shankaracharya* had preached. There he met B.C. Mukhopadhyaya, a Bengali writer of repute, who remarked, "Such vast experience and insight at such an early age! I am sure he will be a great man."

He then travelled in Uttar Pradesh. On the way to Vrindavan, he wanted to borrow a tobacco pipe from a man but he declared himself a sweeper. Shuddering under the weight of habit, Vivekananda refused to accept it. Later he realised his mistake and, ashamed, searched frantically for the man, found him and smoked from his pipe.[1] This incident was an eye-opener. The lesson which he had learned as a child took deep root here. This incident gives us a glimpse of the great education India had in store for him.

His travels were full of travail and danger, some self-inflicted and some forced by circumstances. He observed different vows at different places. At Vrindavan while circumscribing the Govardhan Hill, he determined not to eat till food was forced on him. He went on for several hours in rain. A man called from behind, but Vivekananda, though extremely hungry, started running. At last the man won the race and offered him food, and left without a word. Imagine the feelings of Vivekananda at this benign chance. He was convinced that God was actively protecting him.

Vivekananda's visit to Hathras was remarkable for his dramatic acquisition of his first disciple. The station master, Sharat Chandra Gupta, requested him to visit his home. When

1. In those days big smoking pipes (hukkas) were used in Bengal. Even now wandering monks use them.

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the Swami asked what he would get to eat, Gupta quoted from a Persian poem: "Oh Beloved, I shall prepare the most delicious dish with the flesh of my heart." Swamiji sang, "My beloved must come to me with ashes on his moonface." Transformation came upon Sharat like an electric shock and he became Vivekananda's first disciple under the name *Sadananda*. In their wanderings, once a skeleton with a gerua cloth was seen. Swamiji said, "Sadananda, here a tiger seems to have devoured a monk. Are you afraid?" The latter replied, "Not with you, Swamiji." Vivekananda described Sadananda as "the child of my spirit." He nursed the lepers, worshipping them as God; once for the whole of a night he held a man burning with small-pox against his body to refresh his fever. Sadananda's reverence for his teacher, who carried the disciple in arms and his shoes in his hands, and nursed him in illness, was beyond measure.

In 1890, due to the passing away of Balaram Bose and Suresh Chandra Mitra, the two disciples of Ramakrishna who kept the *Math* afloat, Vivekananda returned to Calcutta and arranged for the finances of the *Math* by strenuously raising funds. In July 1890 he left again deciding never to return. This time he halted at Bhagalpur. Says Manmath Nath Choudhury, "One morning in August 1890, Swamis Vivekananda and Akhandananda came unexpectedly to my house. Thinking them to be ordinary *sadhus*, (monks) . . . and ignorant, ... I began to read an English work on Buddhism . . . . After a while, Swamiji asked me what book I was reading. In reply, I told him the title and asked him 'Do you know English?' 'Yes, a little.' I conversed with him and found that he was a thousand times more learned than I . . . . what he said of *yoga* was exactly the same as what I had heard from Swami Dayananda Saraswati."

At Vaidyanath, Vivekananda played an innocent joke on Raj Narayan Bose, the Brahmo leader. He was informed that Vivekananda did not know English. During the long conversation that ensued the Swami did not use a single English word, expressing "plus" by making a cross with fingers. The joke ripened long after when Raj Narayan Bose came to know that the famous Swami who enchanted audiences in Europe and America was the youth who 'did not know English.'

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In these travels such mirth alternated with intensely serious and prophetic mood. On their way to Almora in the Himalayas Vivekananda meditated for a long time and had a great vision found in his notebook entered thus.

"The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the Universal soul in the living Nature—the objective universe. . . . . This covering of the one by the other is analogous to the relation between an idea and the word expressing it. They are one and the same, and it is only by a mental abstraction that one can distinguish them. Thought is impossible without words."

This thought is the very kernel of Vivekananda's interpretation of the universe as we shall see later.

This sojourn in the Himalayas was darkened by the terrible news of the suicide of one of his sisters due to matrimonial harassment. This personal proximity with the woes of Indian womanhood focussed his attention on them; later education of Indian women and abolition of the cruel practices like child-marriage became major items of his programme.

It was in Alwar, that he defended image-worship with the famous practical analogy. Maharaja Mangal Singh asked him, "Well, Swamiji, I hear that you are a great scholar. Why then do you go about begging?" Adopting the style of answering a question with a piercing question, Vivekananda replied, "Maharaj, tell me why you spend your time constantly in the company of Westerners and neglect your duties to the State?" All were taken aback. The Maharaja, perplexed, said, "I cannot say why, but no doubt because I like to." "Well, for the same reason do I wander about as a fakir," concluded the Swami. When later, the Maharaja ridiculed image-worship, the Swami took a picture of the Maharaja and asked the Dewan to spit on it, who naturally could not do anything of the kind. The Swami then said, "See, your Highness, though this is not you in one sense, in another sense it is you. Similarly in the image the devotee sees God and worships Him. Not a single Hindu says." "O stone, I worship thee. O metal, I worship thee." The Maharaja was quick in praying for the Swami's

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mercy; whereupon the latter replied, "O Prince, God is ever-merciful. Pray to Him". No wonder the Swami was lovingly detained at the Dewan's palace at the Maharaja's instance, where he agreed to stay on condition that the poor be allowed to see him at all hours. Henceforth, wherever he went, the Swami played the leader confidently.

At Jaipur the Swami spent two weeks; it was here that he allowed an insistent devotee to take his picture—his first after becoming a monk. It was this sojourn in Rajasthan which gave Vivekananda one of his most devoted princely devotees: the Raja of Khetri. A Muslim pleader saw Vivekananda observing austerities in a cave near Mount Abu. He informed the private secretary of the Maharaja of Khetri who in turn became so enamoured of the young monk that he lost no time in getting initiated as his disciple. The Maharaja's reverence for the Swami was immense. He was eager even to rub the Swami's feet and fan him, but the Swami did not allow him to do so. The Swami blessed him that a son would be born to him and the blessing came true.

Several incidents lent Vivekananda's discovery of India diverse colours. As he was discovering India, he was himself being discovered. While travelling in Rajasthan he happened to sit between two Englishmen in a railway carriage. Thinking him ignorant at least of English, they cut vulgar jokes at his expense. At one station, Vivekananda asked the Station Master in English for a glass of water. His companions, crest-fallen, apologized and asked him why he was not annoyed. "My friends, this is not the first time that I have seen fools," snubbed Vivekananda. At a place near Khetri, people came to him by the hundred for advice, but nobody enquired whether he had eaten anything. On the third night, a cobbler enquired and offered cooking materials, but Vivekananda had at that time taken the vow not to touch fire, and therefore could not cook. He asked the cobbler to give him chapatis cooked by himself. But the cobbler shrank in fear and told him that he would be severely punished if the Maharaja were to know this. Vivekananda assured him that he would not come into trouble and later made the Maharaja give him a handsome reward.

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From Rajasthan Vivekananda proceeded to Gujarat and stayed with the princes at various places. When questioned about the propriety of a renouncing monk staying with rich princes, he replied, "If I can win over to my cause even one prince, I can indirectly benefit thousands of people." At Jaipur he studied *Sanskrit* Grammar, and at several other places he learned bits of *Sanskrit* language, thus getting an uncommon mastery over it. He was ever anxious and vigilant to collect information about local customs, various religious and industrial problems. His own thoughts were taking shape in all these years. His diagnosis of the Motherland was crystallising.

It was at Khandwa that Swami Vivekananda first expressed his idea of going to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. During his journeys, many intellectuals had suggested that he was a fit person to expound Hinduism in the west. Especially at Bhagalpur, Junagarh, and Porbunder, these suggestions came in more or less concrete form. Somewhere in Gujarat he learned definitely that a Parliament of Religions was to be held in Chicago in 1893. These suggestions agreed with his inner urge to preach Hinduism in the West. Offers of financial help came from princes, especially from Khetri, Mysore and Ramnad; door-to-door collections were later made especially in Madras, and finally his visit to the West materialised.

Vivekananda arrived in Bombay in July 1892, and stayed with Barrister Ramdas Chhabildas. After a stay of several weeks, he travelled to Poona in the company of Lokmanya Tilak with whom he stayed for several days. It would be interesting to hear the great patriot and interpreter of the *Gita* recording his impressions of his great contemporary:

"When asked about his name he only said he was a Sanyasin . . . .There was absolutely no money with him. A deerskin, one or two clothes and a *kamandalu* were his only possessions.

"The Swami happened to express a strong hope that as the women in Maharashtra were not handicapped by *purdah*, it was probable that some of the widows in the higher classes would devote their lives to the spread of spirituality and religion."

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"At one of the meetings of the Deccan Club the Swami accompanied me. That evening the late Kashinath Govind Nath made a fine speech on a philosophical subject. No one had to say anything. But the Swami rose and spoke in fluent English presenting the other aspect of the subject lucidly. Everyone there was thus convinced of his high abilities."*

After passing some memorable days in Trivandrum, Vivekananda went to Ramnad where, Bhaskara Setupati, the Raja, became his earnest devotee and promised him help to go to Chicago. The Swami proceeded to Rameshwar and then to Kanyakumari where he had his famous vision of one India. Having experienced the thrill of sharing the life of his fellow countrymen in its infinite variety, he sat on the last stone at the southern tip, since then known as the **Vivekananda Rock**, and meditated for hours on the Motherland. To quote his own words, "Sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan; we are so many Sannyasins wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. An empty stomach is no good for religion. We as a nation have lost our individuality and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to raise the masses."

Shortly afterwards, he travelled northward to Madras and Hyderabad. The stay at Madras was remarkable for some of his most glorious triumphs in debate and for acquisition of some of his most devoted disciples, like Alasinga Perumal, who begged from door to door for collecting funds for the Swami's voyage to America. Having consulted the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's spouse, he finally decided to go. In the meanwhile he was informed that the Raja of Khetri had been blessed with a son, and was invited to bless the young scion.

At Khetri an incident which served as an eye-opener took place. When a dancing girl was to sing, the Swami refused to attend the programme. Later on mature thought prompted by the girl's song, saying "O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities," he entered the hall. To quote his own words, "Hearing the song, I thought, 'Is this my *sannyasa*?' That incident removed

*Rem. p. 21-22.

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the scales from my eyes, seeing that all are indeed the manifestations of the One, I could no longer condemn anybody."

On the Abu Road station, on his way back, an admirer of the Swami was sitting with him in the carriage. An European ticket-checker came and rudely asked him to get out. When the Swami intervened the railway official addressed him in Hindi using "*tum*" (thou), not a very respectful pronoun. The Swami shot back, "Can you not say *aap* (you)?" The official confessed his ignorance of the language and told him, "I only wanted this man. . . ." "Just now you said that you did not know Hindi", roared Vivekananda, "Now I understand that you do not know your own language. This 'man' of whom you speak is a 'gentleman'." "We must learn to respect ourselves before demanding repect from others," he commented later.

May 31, 1893, was another landmark in Swami Vivekananda's life. On that day, he left the shores of the motherland, mixed emotions like gratitude, anxiety, expectancy, running riot in his heart. Without doubt the thought reigning uppermost in his mind was that of regeneration of the motherland. At Kanyakumari he had visualised the entire nation he had just traversed. He had drunk deep at the current of unity flowing underneath the rocks of diversity. On embarking upon this spiritual expedition therefore he was no longer an individual but, as he himself later said, 'a condensed India.' Naren now set forth for a spiritual conquest assuming the name Vivekananda—the name suggested by the Maharaja of Khetri who had been profoundly impressed by the Swami's discretion. (LEW p. 168)

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5

FIRST VISIT TO THE WEST

THE MORNING sun blinks on the horizon rather silently, we anticipate its rise in the sky, but before we finish our calculations, lo, it is already there enveloping the whole atmosphere! Vivekananda's phenomenal rise to fame was similar. During his travels through the length and breadth of India several thinking men had predicted in him a great son of the motherland, and lo, one fine morning, even before these people had finished their predictions, he dazzled the whole world.

The monk who did not own even a small purse was now menaced with keeping money, spending it and, above all, planning the expenditure. Table manners and social etiquettes had to be learned and mastered; strange food had to be eaten and digested. All this was possibly more amusing than difficult. In his charming letters Vivekananda has left accounts of his reactions to the Western atmosphere and of his impressions of China and Japan, the countries he visited during the brief halts on the way. At Canton, wishing to visit a Chinese monastery erected on grounds forbidden to a foreign national, he told the retreating Chinese guards that he was an Indian *Yogi*, and the word acted like magic. The inmates of the monastery wanted the '*Yogi*' to drive away the evil spirits, which he did by writing the word "*Om*" on bits of paper and scattering them in all directions!

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Vivekananda alighted at Vancouver and proceeded to Chicago by train. He visited the World's Fair of which the Parliament was to be a part. A few days passed, and instinctive recognition came his way; columns began to appear in the papers describing "An Indian Raja." Realising however that he had come much earlier than the date of opening of the Parliament of Religions, he decided to go to Boston which he learned was a cheaper city. On the way to Boston, he met Miss Kate Sanborn, an elderly authoress of 54, whose invitation to stay at her lodge he gratefully accepted. He writes from her "Breezy Meadows" in Metcalf, Massachusetts, "People gather by the hundred in the streets to see me. So what I want is to dress myself in a long black coat, and keep a red robe and turban to wear when I lecture."

Already he had started lecturing and holding meetings. He was introduced to John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek in the Harvard University, who insisted that Vivekananda must represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions and gave him a letter of introduction to the chairman saying "Here is a man more learned than all our learned professors put together." The learned monk had, however, in his simplicity never thought of the formalities of becoming a delegate and getting admission to the Parliament. On returning from Boston, Vivekananda's first night at Chicago was one of predicament. Unable to find a lodging, he slept in a huge empty box. The escape from the difficulty was providential. In the morning, when he was passing before a house, a door opened, and a lady called, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" She was Mrs. Hale. The Hale family became one of his warmest hosts in America.

The Parliament of Religions was undoubtedly one of the most epoch-making world meetings in human history. It opened on 11th September, 1893 in the spacious Art Institute in Chicago the hall having a capacity to seat more than five thousand people, and lasted seventeen days. Representatives from several countries, and all religions, were seated on the platform, including Mazoomdar of the Brahmo Samaj, Nagarkar of the Prarthana Samaj, Gandhi representing the Jains, and Chakravarti and Mrs. Annie Besant representing Theosophy. None represented Hinduism, as such, and that mantle fell on Vivekananda.

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The first sentence Vivekananda uttered has since been hailed as a hymn inaugurating a new epoch of friendly relations between the two nations. "Sisters and Brothers of America, I greet the youngest nation in the name of the oldest nation in the world." He writes, "Of course my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up; I was so nervous and could not venture to speak in the morning. . . . I addressed the assembly as 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' a deafening applause of two minutes followed, . . . then I proceeded and when it was finished, I sat down exhausted with emotion."[1] In the eyes of Marie Louise Burke this applause could not "have been inspired by his words alone, for sentiments of universal brotherhood had been given voice throughout the whole morning and half the afternoon. Rather, it was inspired by Swamiji himself and by something unspoken that came through his words, making them not sentiment but fact and recalling some long-forgotten sense of spiritual unity in the hearts of the people." Indeed Vivekananda, in this address, did nothing less than sounding the death-knell of religious intolerance. He quoted from the *Gita* to emphasize that God is merciful to everyone irrespective of his path.

The Monk took the Parliament and America by storm. His pictures appeared everywhere and his eloquence became a household chat. He was a favourite with the masses who underwent the drudgery of lengthy academic speeches to listen to him for half an hour at the end. On September 19, he read his famous paper on "Hinduism". The upshot of all this was that he was a tremendous success. Mervin-Marie Snell says that he "was beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. . . . The most rigid of orthodox Christians say of him, 'He is indeed a prince among men." Dr. Annie Besant wrote, ". . . a lion head, piercing eyes. . . . . monk they called him, not unwarrantably, but warrior-monk was he. . . . India was not to be shamed by the hurrying arrogant West by this her envoy and her son. He brought her message, he spoke in her name, and the herald remembered the dignity of the royal land whence he came. . . .

1. *LSV. p. 73.*

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'That man a heathen' said one, 'and we send missionaries to his people. It would be more fitting that they send missionaries to us."

Within the mad onrush of energy that is American life Vivekananda retained his meditative calm. That was another test in which he distinguished himself. He was a living example of the ideal man who, as he himself says, "in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert.[2] Sister Nivedita says, "When he sat down to meditate, in two minutes he felt nothing, though his body be black with mosquitoes. With this habit thus deeply ingrained, he landed in America, that country of railroads and tramways, and complicated engagement lists; and at first it was no uncommon thing for him to be carried two or three times round a tram-circuit, only disturbed periodically by the conductor asking for the fare!"[3]

He longed for the life of the monk amid that unceasing struggle for material comforts. When he lived in a simple apartment in New York with Leon Landsberg, he was very happy. He says, "Between Mr. Landsberg and me, we cook some rice, lentils or barley and quietly eat it, and write something, or read, or receive visits from poor people who want to learn something, and thus I feel I am more a *sannyasin* now than I ever was in America." On the other hand, he made zealous efforts to assimilate American social etiquette and often asked with innocent simplicity questions like "Does the gentleman precede while going up the stairs, or the lady?"

The greatest good that resulted out of his triumphs in America was the unprecedented revival of national pride in India. Meetings were held in several cities in India, in which leaders like Surendra Nath Bannerjee spoke, and Vivekananda was felicitated for his great work.

In October 1895 Swami Vivekananda paid his first visit to England, making a brief halt at Paris on the way. St. T. Sturdy and Miss Henrietta Muller along with others had been inviting

2. KY p. 12.
3. LEW p. 323.

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him for a long time. He himself asserted that "The British Empire with all its drawbacks is the greatest machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas. I mean to put my ideas in the centre of this machine, and they will spread all over the world. Of course, all great work is slow and the difficulties are too many, especially as the Hindus are the conquered race. Yet that is the very reason why it is bound to work, for spiritual ideals have always come from the downtrodden. Jews overwhelmed the Roman Empire with their spiritual ideal."[4]

At London the usual strenuous routine of public lectures, group conversations and interviews began. England gave him, too, some of his famous disciples, the foremost being Miss Margaret Noble, later Sister Nivedita. A press report will give a glimpse of his work in London. "It is indeed a rare sight to see some of the most *fashionable* ladies in London seated on the floor crosslegged, of course, for want of chairs, listening with all the *Bhakti* of an Indian *chela* towards his *Guru*. The love and sympathy for India that the Swami is creating in the minds of the English-speaking race is sure to be a tower of strength for the progress of India." The Swami himself writes, "In England, my work is really splendid. . . . Bands and bands come and I have no room for so many; so many squat on the floor, ladies and all. . . . I am really tired from incessant work. . . . I want to go to India for a long rest."[5]

Swami Vivekananda returned to New York on December 6, 1895. The usual programme of lectures commenced. J. J. Goodwin was engaged as a stenographer, and he made a shorthand job of learning religion. He turned out to be an ardent disciple to whose untiring labours we owe Vivekananda's great treatises on *Karma-Yoga*, *Jnana-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga*. The Swami's lectures concluded on 24 February 1896, with a most stirring tribute to "My Master." His influence on the New York society was so deeply felt that Kripananda (Landsberg) humorously wrote, "By the way, India had better at once make clear her title to the ownership of the Swami. They are about to write his biography for the national Encyclopaedia

4. LSV p. 323.
5. LEW p. 379.

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of the U. S., thus making him an American citizen." Mrs. Wilcox, the famous poetess, met the Swami and became a devout pupil of the old beautiful Religion of India as taught by Vivekananda. The Swami also visited Detroit for two weeks. Finally the "*Vedanta* Society of New York" came into being in February 1896 and Francis H. Leggett was made its President. Professor William James, who later referred to Vivekananda in his "The Variety of Religious Experience," became his fervent admirer and addressed him as "Master". Even as the age of electricity was dawning Swami Vivekananda's electrifying presence in America sparked off currents of spirituality.

April 15, 1896, saw Vivekananda off the shores of America. On his reaching London he met Swami Saradananda richly laden with eagerly awaited news from India. The Swami's London programme was again a series of interviews, and lectures under various auspices, including one at the lodge of Annie Besant. And that visit to the venerable silverhaired Professor Max Muller! . . 'Ramakrishna is worshipped by thousands, today, Professor,' I said. 'To whom else shall worship be accorded, if not to such?' was his answer." He accompanied the Swami to the railway station, because, 'it is not every day one meets with a disciple of Ramakrishna.' Miss Muller, Miss Noble, E. T. Sturdy, Sevier and Mrs. Sevier now joined him as disciples. The Seviers indeed showered filial affection on the childlike Vivekananda.

Returning to England the Swami resumed his lectures. News of Swami Saradananda's success in America and Swami Abhedananda's performance in London gave him profound satisfaction. "An overwhelming joy was noticeable in the Swami in his scholar's success. Joy compelled him to put at least some of itself into words that rang with delight unalloyed." In London the roots of Swami Vivekananda's work sank slowly but deep. The reason was that the Swami promoted religion and not a religion. As Sister Nivedita writes, "To not a few of us the words of Swami Vivekananda came as living water to men perishing of thirst. . . . It was the Swami's 'I am God' that came as something always known, only never said before." Bipin Chandra Pal wrote to "The Indian Mirror" from London, "In many parts of England I have met with men who

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deeply regard and venerate Vivekananda. . . . Owing to the spread of Vivekananda's doctrines, many hundreds of people have receded from Christianity. . . . (once) I lost my way. . . . A lady showed me my way and said, 'From certain papers I learnt that you were coming to London. At the very first sight of you, I was telling my son, 'Look, there is Swami Vivekananda.' . . . I felt highly gratified at the agreeable incident, and thanked my gerua (crimson) turban which had given me so much honour."[6]

On December 16, 1896, Swami Vivekananda with the Seviers left for Europe on way to India. His host gives vent to the deep agony of separation felt at his departure by numerous Englishmen. He says, "I am heavy-headed today at the loss of the noblest friend and the purest teacher I have met in this incarnation." If a man inspires such feelings in the heart of one, his life would not be lived in vain. Swami Vivekananda left behind hundreds of such English hearts.

6. LEW p. 441.

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6

RETURN & CONSOLIDATION

ABSENCE from India for four years had set an eager edge to Swami Vivekananda's devotion for the motherland. He explained, "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, ... it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage." On way he visited France, Italy, seeing Leonardo da Vinci's famous "The Last Supper" at Milan, and left Naples on 30 December, 1896. An amusing incident on board may be noted here. Two of his fellow passengers would abuse India day in and day out, and they stopped this only when the Swami warned them, with severity tactfully clothed in smiles, "If you abuse my religion again I'll throw you overboard!"

On January 26, 1897, Swami Vivekananda alighted at Pamban where the Raja of Ramnad had personally arrived to welcome him. The meeting of the Monk and the Prince, who prostrated himself in reverence, was a memorable sight. In the procession the Raja himself drew the carriage. He fed and clothed thousands of poor people on the occasion and erected a pillar of victory in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's touching the Indian soil. On way to Madras, at several places where the train would not stop, the people squatted on the rails and allowed the train to pass only after hearing the Swami. At

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Kumbakonam, Vivekananda delivered his famous speech on "The Mission of the *Vedanta*".

The reception at Madras had its peculiarly towering glamour. "It was Madras that first recognised the superior merits of the Swami. Madras will now have again the honour of welcoming the undoubtedly great man who has done so much to raise the prestige of his motherland," wrote 'The Madras Times'. "Never since its earliest days had Madras witnessed such an enthusiastic reception, accorded to any one, European or Indian." The Swami gave some of his most famous addresses in Madras: "My Plan of Campaign", "The Sages of India", "*Vedanta* in its relation to practical life" and "The future of India." The throng of visitors was never-ending. He sang Jayadeva's sweet songs, on an occasion to the immense delight of the audience.

The boat on board which Vivekananda left Madras for Calcutta was loaded with coconuts given to him as parting gifts. Sevier wondered if it was a freight boat! The Swami said that he had been advised to drink coconut-milk instead of water and hence these gifts! At Calcutta princes and scholars, the rich and the poor, were vying with each other to honour the Swami. On February 28, 1897, an unprecedented public ovation was accorded to him. The reply he gave has gone down in public memory as a hymn of patriotism. The lecture on 'The *Vedanta* in all its phases' which he gave shortly afterwards is another landmark in the wonderful cascade of lectures delivered by him since well-known as "From Colombo to Almora."

Swami Vivekananda remained in Calcutta till early May, 1897. Now, he felt, had come the time for silent, solid and organised work. He was now confident of his hold over India's masses, and wanted to mould the clay when it was soft. In a letter of May 5, 1897, he writes, "I was one man in America and another here. Here the whole nation is looking upon me as their authority; there I was a much reviled preacher. Here princes draw my carriage; there I would not be admitted to a decent hotel." Service to the Society was the main plank of his work. He infused the spirit of service in his fellow monks and disciples. Centres were opened in Madras and other places in addition to Calcutta. Akhandananda organised famine relief work in Murshidabad district, which was much appreciated. Gradually

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the Ramakrishna *Math*, the organ for propagating religion, and the Ramakrishna Mission, the organ for service, were coming into being. From their very inception the Swami was scrupulous to breathe breadth of vision into them. When on one occasion, his fellow monks objected to the entry into the *Math* of a man with a bad record, the Swami said, "If we shrink from sinners, who else will save them?" No thought of caste and creed was allowed by the Swami to interfere with the sacred mission of service. Further the Swami scrupulously avoided everything that tended to degenerating his teaching into a sect; for instance, he refused innumerable requests for his discipleship. He accepted only those who could devote themselves wholly to his teachings and could be kept within the range of constant vigil and affection. Eventually on May 1, 1897, the Ramakrishna Mission formally came into existence.

In Panjab the mission of establishing harmony between the *Arya Samaj* and the remaining Hindus on one hand and Hindus and *Muslims* on the other claimed his attention. He persuaded these groups to give up prejudices and respect the merits of each other in a brotherly spirit. His visit to Lahore was memorable for several famous speeches and for his inspiring association with Tirtha Ram Goswami, a brilliant professor of mathematics, who later graced the famous name, Swami Rama Tirtha. Tirtha Ram, already fired with renunciation and a rare zeal for service was inspired by Vivekananda immensely; an illuminating light kindled another like itself. Swami Rama Tirtha later preached *Vedanta* in India and in America where President Wilson paid him a visit. In him the chain of spiritual giants in India found the link subsequent to the one which Vivekananda constituted; but unfortunately he passed away in 1906 at the early age of thirtytwo. Tirtha Ram says about a song the Swami sang at his residence, "His melodious voice made the meaning of the song thrill through the hearts of those present." At the time of departure he presented the Swami with a gold watch, which the latter returned to Tirtha Ram's pocket saying "Very well, friend, I shall wear it here in this pocket."

At Delhi he preferred to stay at the house of Nata Krishna, a poor devotee who had shielded him from want during his earlier visit in obscuracy. At Khetri, the Prince presented the

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Swami with three thousand rupees which was sent to the *Math* at Belur. His lectures at Khetri were particularly learned; in one of them he traced the history of civilization in a most graphic style and contrasted the Greek and Indian contributions to human knowledge: a veritable feast of scholarship to the distinguished audience.

In January 1898 Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta and remained there till the end of March. During these three months training of the disciples, consolidating the work of the *Math* and various other organisational matters engaged the major part of his attention. On February 6, the consecration of a temple in a devotee's house made a great event due to Vivekananda's presence in all the simplicity of disciple of Ramakrishna. At this time he composed the verse later included in the regular prayer:

> "Salutation to thee, O Ramakrishna, the
> Reinstator of religion, the embodiment of all
> Religions, the Greatest of all Incarnations."

The presence of the Swami at the *Math* meant incessant activity and training, most of it assimilated by the disciples smoothly. He varied his instruction according to the nature and capacity of the disciple. Some he advised meditation in seclusion; to others he enjoined service of the poor and the diseased; yet others were asked by him to tour the countryside preaching *Vedanta* and the gospel of service. Study of particular texts was prescribed to some disciples, while instructions and practice in speaking were given to others. He could peep deep into the mental recesses of each of his followers and associates and direct his or her progress along the most fruitful lines. For instance he characterised Turiyananda's voice as oratorial, and commended Akhandananda's organisational talents. Thus his guidance was dished out suited to the requirements of the recipient and was invariably full of relish.

At this time Vivekananda availed of the large monetary offer made by Mrs. Ole Bull during his stay in England, and planned the construction of the Belur *Math*, which has since

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become a sacred shrine. Mrs. Bull herself arrived shortly afterwards. Swarupananda became editor of *Prabuddha Bharat* and made a splendid job of it. Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) was destined to carve out a place for herself in millions of Indian hearts through her untiring efforts in the cause of women's education. Miss Muller and Sister Nivedita embraced Hinduism and founded an ideal school for women at Calcutta. What could be more thrilling and inspiring than to see Nivedita, an English lady, leading bands of Indians in their struggle against the partition of Bengal in 1905? When on march 11, 1898, Nivedita addressed a public meeting on "The Influence of Indian Spiritual Thought in England," Swami Vivekananda introduced his worthy spiritual daughter as a gift from England to India. Miss Muller thrilled the same audience when she told them that on coming to India she felt she had returned to her home. Indeed in all Western disciples of Vivekananda love for India blazed incessantly. When asked by Miss Josephine MacLeod how best she could serve him, he uttered only two words by way of answer, "Love India." Nivedita interpreted India to the West through her entertaining and instructive books including "Cradle tales of Hinduism." The hardships and mental tribulations which these great Western friends of India must have undergone in the process of adopting an alien faith, and, what is more, so different a way of living were simply tremendous; it was a skinning operation of the toughest magnitude, it was a holy sacrifice. The profound respect Nivedita had for her *guru* may be sensed in the following description:

"She knelt down beside the door frame and folded her hands, her fingers and palms joined to offer her obeisance to the Lord. She bowed down in this posture and then remained quietly sitting on her ankles with joined palms . . . Swamiji talked with her for a while, and she also answered in a soft voice reverentially as if she was in a church . . .Her face had a serenity and fullness that one sees in the face of Madonna that indicates the direct vision of God in person. . ."

On May 11, 1898, Swami Vivekananda left for Almora again. During this tour he fulfilled his long-standing desire to

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visit Amarnath. It was a great moment of revelation; he exclaimed afterwards, "I hugged the form of Death."

The year 1899 was spent in Calcutta in consolidating the various branches of work started from time to time. Various centres of the Ramakrishna Mission had been established; journals like "*Prabuddha Bharat*' and "*Udbodhan*" had started preaching *Vedanta*, schools like that of Nivedita were educating the young generation; social services was being undertaken in times of distress. In numerous towns which Vivekananda had visited, students societies practising the ideal of service had been established.

This period is thus characterised by Swami Vivekananda's efforts to make the nation live *Vedanta*; even as Bhagirath brought the *Ganga* down to the earth, Vivekananda brought religion and philosophy down to the common household.

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7

IN THE WEST AGAIN

SEA HAD proved to be particularly congenial to the Swami's well-being. He rejoiced in a sea-voyage, and his physical condition improved. Even within the shores of India, between Madras and Calcutta he travelled by sea, with the curious result that Andhra Pradesh and Orissa were the only provinces never touched by this globe-trotter. Moreover, during a sea-voyage, the strain of talking to visitors *ad infinitum* could be automatically avoided. Invitations from America and England were pouring in constantly. Dictates of health and demands of the people thus directed his feet towards the West again.

Swami Vivekananda left Calcutta on June 20, 1899. Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita accompanied him. He rated Turiyananda's abilities high, and planned to introduce him to America. "They have seen the *Kshatra* (heroic) power; now I want to show them the *Brahmana*," he explained. The journey was a great experience for the three. Sister Nivedita has happily left its memoirs.

Their first halt was at Madras, where they were required to stay aboard for they had come from Calcutta where the plague was raging. Yet the people came in boats to the steamer bringing all kinds of gifts. Availing of the short halt on the way the party visited old friends in Colombo. On July 31, they were warmly received in London. Mrs. Funke and another lady anxious about his health, had dashed to London all the way

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from Detroit, and remarked, "He had grown very slim and looked and acted like a boy. He was so happy to find that the voyage had brought back some of his old strength and vigour." Having rested for a couple of weeks in London Vivekananda left for America on August 26. For Mrs. Funke, "These were ten never-to-be-forgotten days spent on the ocean. Reading and exposition of the *Geeta* occupied every morning, also reciting and translating poems and stories from Sanskrit and chanting old *Vedic* hymns."

During his absence the work in the West had registered rapid strides of progress. His books, that on *Raja Yoga* especially, had found wide currency, and followers of his teachings who had not yet seen or heard him were numerous. In Ceylon Vivekananda acquired in Mrs. Pickett (Haripriya) another gem of a disciple who later preached *Vedanta* in Australia and New Zealand. Abhedananda and others were vigorously acclaimed in America, and addressed meetings by the hundreds. Abhedananda was acquainted with several celebrities including Thomas Alva Edison, the famous Scientist, and William Dean Howells, the novelist. "It will be impossible to tell how many will look back in after years to the teachings of the Swamis as a turning point in their lives."

Until November 5, Swami Vivekananda stayed at the country home of the Leggetts, spending the days in calm meditation, restful reflection and delightful conversation. On October 15, the permanent quarters of the *Vedanta* Society of New York were declared open. Turiyananda was silently slipped in, and beginning with talks on "*Hitopadesa*" a Sanskrit collection of tales of wisdom, he is seen, shortly afterwards, discoursing learnedly on Shankaracharya. The public work of Vivekananda himself started again with a discussion on November 8, and on November 10, he was given a rousing reception. He lectured in the city and surrounding towns until November 22 and left for Chicago. Having lectured in Chicago and nearby towns for some days, he left for Los Angeles in the first week of December 1899.

Vivekananda's second visit to America was most remarkable for his famous Californian lectures. As usual these covered a very wide arena, extending from the life of Prahlada, the ancient

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child-devotee of India, to the inmost secrets of the mind. The inspiring talks on "The Powers of the mind" and "The Way to the Realisation of a Universal Religion" evoked a tremendous interest. Countless requests for personal guidance came in and the Swami had to open regular classes in San Francisco, the capital city of California. Vivekananda was nothing if not an anxious pacifier of spiritual thirst. Close on the end of May he laboured incessantly, and strained every nerve to give away every bit of knowledge conceivable. Luckily at this time a magnanimous gift of 160 acres of land was made by Miss M. G. Book, in which land a lovely "*Shanti Ashram*" (Retreat of Peace) was established. This was the serene crowning glory of his memorable stay in California.

Returning to New York he gave several public discourses and many more private talks. Sister Nivedita, who had come earlier from England, gave very lively and penetrating talks on "The Ideals of Hindu Women" and "The Ancient Arts of India." Swami Vivekananda visited Detroit again, and then rounded off this sojourn in America by settling various organisational matters and suggesting several measures to his lieutenants. In the words of Mrs. Annie Smith, "the spiritual seed of the Swamiji's planting was springing up all over the Pacific coast, for they vitalised American religions and sects, as well as Hinduism." Indeed he spontaneously assumed the role of a roving spitual ambassador of India, and played it splendidly.

Invitations from Paris and other cities of Europe were reaching Swami Vivekananda in America; organisers of the Paris Congress of the History of Religions were expecting him to turn up. The Swami sailed for Paris on July 20, 1900, to reach there on August 1. He stayed in Paris till December paying short visits to Brittany, Vienna, Constantinople, Athens and Egypt. For the greater part of this period he was the guest of Jules Bois, the famous thinker. He had no more than a nodding acquaintance with French, but within two months he cultivated a mastery over the language enabling him to lecture effectively in it. His Paris addresses were memorable for the scholarly penetration they displayed into such intricate problems as *Linga*-worship, and authenticity of the *Gita*. He visited the Paris Exposition several times assimilating minute bits of

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knowledge of Western civilization and science. His conversations during this period gave vent to his mature thoughts on comparative culture; in Paris, Vivekananda beautifully assumed the role of a supreme mediator between the East and the West. Sarah Bernhardt, the stage and screen celebrity, met him again in Paris; she had staged a realistic drama about India with a feeling insight. He held series of discussions with eminent men from several walks of life, including Hiram Maxim, the ardent sympathiser of India and China, and Madame Calve, the reputed singer, who reverently addressed him, "My Father."

Longing fervently to return to the motherland, Swami Vivekananda left Paris on October 24, 1900, and arrived at the monastery at Belur on December 9.

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8

THE TORCH ABLAZE

THE FIRST home-coming of Swami Vivekananda had resounded with the conches of welcome; this second home-coming was its reverse. He had not informed anyone of his arrival. The ship touched Bombay, the Swami took the first train to Calcutta, and arrived at the Belur Monastery on the night of December 9, 1900. The event could not be more dramatic and unexpected. The joy of the inmates knew no bounds. Swamiji joined them in eating the simple *Khichdi*; nobody slept a wink that night, the night was too short for all the anxious chats they wanted to have.

The passing away of J.H. Sevier came as a great blow. The devoted disciple, along with his wife, made Vivekananda's dream of a Himalayan monastery a reality. He had expired on October 28, on which day Vivekananda had had a premonition of the tragedy. He now wanted to proceed to Mayavati and stand by Mrs. Sevier in her sad bereavement.

On January 24, 1901, he arrived back at the Belur Monastery. Henceforth till the end he stayed there guiding the work of the Ramakrishna Mission, and the Ramakrishna *Math* and the work in England and America.

Thousands of visitors came to him during these years. The Maharaja of Gwalior met him and sought his guidance. In December 1901, the Indian National Congress met in session at Calcutta. Several of the prominent political stalwarts, including

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Lokamanya Tilak, called on him. Tilak says, "Swami Vivekananda received us very cordially. We took tea. In the course of the-conversation Swamiji happened to remark in a jocular spirit that it would be better if I renounced the world and took up his work in Bengal while he would go and continue the same in Maharashtra. 'One does not carry,' he said, 'the same influence in one's own province as in a distant one."

In December 1901 two learned monks from Japan, Oda and Okakura, paid him a visit and invited him to Japan to participate in the Congress of Religions scheduled to be held there. Vivekananda's health at this time was, to say the least, precarious. Yet in the enthusiasm aroused by the discussion he consented. He also agreed to accompany his guests in their pilgrimage to Buddha Gaya and Varanasi. As Nivedita beautifully puts it, "It was a fit ending to all his wandering."

His return from Varanasi ushers in the evening of his life. The serene sublimity of his stoic courage in the face of mounting suffering made a touching impression upon his visitors. But "ill as he looked, there was none, probably, who suspected how near the end had come. Yet visits were paid and farewells exchanged that had needed voyages half round the world to make."

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9

THE LONG LEAVE

DIABETES is the special scourge of Bengal. In its evil design on the fabric of Swami Vivekananda's body, it had found a faithful ally in Asthma. The body was indeed too tired. His whirlwind tours, crowded lecturing engagements, private discussions and huge correspondence kept him working sixteen hours a day on the average. The severe austerities he performed in the prime of youth had already sapped his physical strength. During the last months his feet were swollen, and he could hardly walk. Sleep was rare in the last month. But in spite of the physical ailments, he never ceased to be of good cheer.

Indeed, it transpired afterwards that Vivekananda had already fixed up the date for his leaving the body. Some days prior to his demise he was seen intently studying the almanac; nobody knew for which occasion he was looking up an auspicious moment—the occasion turned out to be his own death. Only three days earlier he pointed out the spot for his cremation—the one at which a temple in his memory today stands. He had remarked to several persons that he would not live to be forty. Indeed, he had peeped into the vast, abysmal chasm of death when he had attained absolute concentration in the spirit (*Nirvikalpa Samadhi*) in his youth only to be brought back by Sri Ramakrishna who had told him, "This is your mango. Look. I lock it in my box. You shall taste it

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once more, when your work will be finished." On quite a few occasions be had distinct premonitions of death, and had told his companions so. In the midst of furious activity he had told Abhedananda in New York in 1899, "Well, brother, my days are numbered. I shall live only three or four years at the most." Abhedananda naturally protested vigorously against such saddening talk, but Vivekananda assured him, "You do not understand me, brother. I feel that I am growing very big . . . I am about to burst, surely this cage of flesh and blood cannot hold me for many years more." Earlier, at Lahore, he had told N.N. Gupta, 'with perfect unconcern,' "I have three years more to live, and the only thought that disturbs me is whether I shall be able to give effect to all my ideas within this period."[1]

A *Karma-yogin* to the core as he was, his love for his lifework did not abate till the last moment. Only on the Sunday before his death he declared, "You know the work is always my weak point, when I think that might come to an end, I am all undone." On the last day of his mortal presence he was up and moving, a trifle healthier, if anything, Departing from his usual practice during the illness of eating in his own room, he ate with all the inmates, with a perfect appetite. In the afternoon, he "gave talks on Sanskrit grammar, philosophy, and on the *Vedas* for more than two hours and discoursed on the *yoga* philosophy. He walked for about two miles, and on returning enquired after every one very tenderly. While resting for a time he conversed on the rise and fall of nations with his campanions, and then went to his room to meditate."—that was his last meditation. He passed away a few minutesa fter nine p. m. on July 4, 1902, without the knowledge of anyone. The final halt was called to a rich and full life; a golden page in the history of modern India was turned!

1. Rem. p. 20.

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10

PERSONAL HABITS

'And then he came: his very entrance and his silence as he stood and waited to begin were like some great hymn. A worship in themselves!'—Sister Nivedita.*

SEVERAL persons have described the impact of his look and touch. He had a superb carriage of the head, was very handsome in an oriental way, about thirty years old in time, ages in civilization.[1] On 12th February, 1894, "Miss Cook, a teacher of German in a Detroit High School, felt an impulse to congratulate him. She felf suddenly overwhelmed and at a loss for words. Vivekananda held her hand for several moments. "I shall never forget his searching look. I was so aware of his greatness and holiness that I could not bear to wash my hands for three days!" She later told.[2]

The very appearance of Vivekananda was pleasing, and inspired purity. On his arrival in America, the phrenologists lost no time in analysing his physical features. 'He is five feet eight and a half inches in height and weights one hundred and seventy pounds. His head measures twenty-one and three fourth inches in circumference.'

*Rem. p. 59.

1. S.V.A. p. 20.
2. S.V.A. p. 193.

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It is not surprising therefore, that literally hundreds of descriptions of his first impressions are extant, and they abound in all kinds of superlatives. While an American lady said with ecstasy on seeing him "Oh, he is like a lovely golden statue!"[3] the correspondent of the 'English Westminster Gazette" concluded the account of his interview with Vivekananda with the words, "I then took my leave from one of the most original of men that I have had the honour of meeting."[4] His 'personal magnetism' was credited with a large share of his success.

Vivekananda's innate nobility was reflected in his movements as well. His gait reflected his '*Ojas*', his virility and splendour. He always looked skywards, and never saw, as some one remarked in fun, anything below the top of the telegraph pole. With his physical prowess, he called the bluff of anaemic, starving sainthood. He was an expert wrestler. At Madras he once casually asked a gentleman whether the latter could wrestle. Getting an affirmative reply Vivekananda was immersed in a moment in vigorous wrestling. All those who were present were naturally astonished. He was called then the '*Pailwan Swami*' (the athlete Swami). As Sister Christine remarks, 'A sickly saint everyone understands, but who ever heard of a powerful saint?[5]

Vivekananda observed no restrictions in the matter of eating and smoking. Wine he strictly avoided. Meat-eating was in his family, and he did not give it up. During several periods of religious vows, however, he did not eat meat and did not smoke. In the West his meat-eating did not surprise anyone, but in India, where religion and non-meat-eating were somehow thought by many to be inseparable, he had to encounter some trouble on this account. This trouble started as early as his embracing the discipline of Ramakrishna. From Ramakrishna's stand-point he was 'a burning, roaring fire consuming all impurities to ashes; even should Naren live on beef and pork, it could not harm in the least the great power of spirituality

3. Rem. p. 372.
4. LEW. p. 375.
5. Rem. p. 154.

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within him![6] But other disciples objected to Naren's meat-eating, and, what was more, his advocacy thereof, and debates ensued. Naren assured them that he could live on rice alone, even without salt. Later, when a cry about his meat-eating was raised in India by those who evidently did not relish his successes in America, he retorted, "Is God a nervous fool, like you that the flow of his mercy would be dammed up by a piece of meat? If such be He, His value is not a pie."[7]

Vivekananda's renunciation did not run counter to healthy enjoyment of the pleasures of life, and these included that of eating. In his prime of youth he is described as 'one who enjoyed good dishes, knew how to appreciate the *Hookah* and the pipe, yet harped on renunciation with an ability that called forth admiration and a sincerity that commanded respect.'[8]

Vivekananda gave considerable thought to the subject of diet. He had formulated his notions, and practised them himself. He ate chillies and pepper and other strong spices. He said, "During his wanderings, a monk has to take all kinds of food and drink water from all sorts of places; that tells upon the health. To counteract their bad effect, many monks become addicted to hemp and other intoxicants. For the same reason I have taken to Chilli."[9]

His love of Chilli astonished his American hosts. The lady who witnessed him eating says, "She handed him the bottle of the condiment and said, 'You might like a drop or two of this on your meat, Swami.' He sprinkled it on with such a lavish hand that we all gasped and said, 'But you can't do that! It's terribly hot!' He laughed and ate it with such enjoyment that a special bottle of the sauce was always put at his place after that." Another favourite dish of the Swami was icecream. In America he ate lots of icecream. During his stay in Madras after his triumphant return, pointing to a dish of icecream, he humorously remarked, "I can renounce everything excepting this." He was a good cook too. A most interesting description of his culinary efficiency is left for us by an American disciple:

6. LEW. p. 103.
7. Lett. p. 91.
8. LEW. p. 271.
9. Rem. p. 39.

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"After the morning talk and meditation, Swami would be interested in the preparations for dinner. Sometimes he helped. He made curry for us and showed us how they grind spices in India. He would sit on the floor in his tent with a hollow stone in his lap. With another smooth round stone he would grind the spices much finer than we can do with a bowl and chopper. This would make the curry quite hot enough for us, but Swami would augment it by eating tiny red-hot peppers on the side. He would throw his head back and toss them into his mouth with a great circular movement of his arm. Once he handed me one of them, saying, 'Eat it. It will do you good.' One would eat poison if offered by Swamiji, so I obeyed, with agonizing result, to his great amusement. At intervals all the afternoon he kept asking, 'How is your oven?' Another time he made rock candy for us, explaining how it is the purest kind of candy, all the impurities being removed by boiling and boiling."[10] During the retreat at the Thousand Islands Park, Vivekananda would say with utmost sweetness, 'Today I shall cook for you'. To this Landsberg would ejaculate in an aside, 'Heaven save us!' By way of explanation he said that in New York when Swamiji cooked, he, Landsberg, would tear his hair, because it meant that afterwards every dish in the house required washing!"

Vivekananda's addiction to smoking is well known. Though he spent long periods without a smoke, when he got it he enjoyed it with evident relish. He however did not approve of smoking; he just condoned it as too trivial a drawback. To a question why he craved passionately for tobacco in spite of his professing renunciation, he replied that before becoming a monk, he had led a gay life of an aristocratic college student, now he found it difficult to give up things like tobacco to which he had become habituated. He confessed that he allowed himself to enjoy tobacco as that was of small consequence. In his later life, however, he reduced smoking to the minimum, and discouraged it. A disciple relates, "Suddenly, I know not why, Swamiji asked me, 'Do you smoke?' I replied, 'No', to which Swamiji replied, 'Very well, smoking is not good. I am also trying to leave it off."

10. Rem. p. 380.

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Vivekananda calmly advocated meat-eating, and expounded his belief that 'the disfavour into which flesh had fallen was one of the chief causes of the gradual decline of the national strength, and the final overthrow of the national independence of the united ancient Hindu races and states of India.'[11]

This belief is indeed widespread. Mahatma Gandhi entertained it in his boyhood and made an abortive experiment in meat-eating which however was but a prelude to his life-long campaign for non-meat-eating. It is interesting to note that around 1893 in which year Vivekananda made his above advocacy of meat-eating, Gandhi was launching his vigorous attack on meat-eating especially through 'The Vegetarian'.[12] A short discussion of Vivekananda's view of meat-eating will be attempted in Section 5. Suffice to say here that, his view as well as Gandhi's were conditioned, like most thoughts of men, by their births in families who were respectively habitual meat-eaters and staunch meat-abstainers.

11. Rem. p. 71.
12. The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (The Publications Division). Vol. I, pp. 24-35.

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11

HIS MIND

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S mind was transparent as a child's. His innocent childlike smile was most captivating and reflected a genial and loving heart. Every bit of life interested him and his delight and enthusiasm in simple, trivial matters amused those present immensely. "Like a boy he would dispute with Swami Brahmananda with regard to the boundaries that separated the pasture-field for the cows from the latter's vegetable and flower gardens, and the alleged trespassing from one side or the other."[1] A border-dispute indeed!

Vivekananda's childlike moods contrasted with his intensely serious moods to weave a most colourful texture. The passage from one to the other was sometimes abrupt, at other times smooth, but always natural. After passing through the severe strain of a spiritual lecture he frequently laughed and said, "Thank God, it is over!" After long periods of serious reading and writing he often read humour-magazines like 'Punch'. Sometimes, he borrowed his childhood naughtiness, and exercised his liberty assiduously by eating with his fingers at American dining tables. Once when some pickle juice flowed down his hands, he licked his fingers, and remonstrated with his shocked hostess, "This little outside! That's the trouble

1. LEW p. 716.

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with you here! you always want this outside to be so nice."[2] A hostess whose household plans he upset by his unpredictable ideas, said, "At the last moment he upsets all my plans for him. He must have his own way, he is just like a mad bull in a china-shop."[3] Like a simlpe-minded villager he kept in a handkerchief the money offered by his American audiences for his work in India. As soon as he came home he poured the entire collection into the lap of the old hostess. She taught him to count the money and maintain proper accounts.

His curious mind was always alert and eagerly collected bits of information regarding life around him. Apparently trivial incidents were sometimes meaningful to him. Once while hewas eating breakfast with his companions, a Red Indian boy, watching them, exclaimed, 'Black man like coffee, white man like coffee; red man like coffee!' Vivekananda was greatly amused, and gave the boy coffee. He laughingly repeated the boy's remark throughout the day. Possibly he was amused at the naive discovery of the boy of an attribute (that of liking coffee) common to persons drawn from three distant corners of the world.

Greatness and humility go hand in hand. The greater the man becomes, the more vividly he visualises infinite horizons of greatness ahead and ponders over his littleness, shrinks in humility. Vivekananda's modesty was such. It was genuine, unreserved and profound. Readiness to own his mistakes was inherent in him.

In 1895, he writes, "I know very little; that little I teach without reserve; where I am ignorant I confess . . . . .I am a *Sannyasin* . . . . .I hold myself a servant, not a master in this world."[4] He said that loss of one or two like him could not deviate the earth from its axis. Wherever the Master was concerned his humility was beyond words. For several days he could not be persuaded to publish his exquisite discourse 'My Master'. He humbly said, "I did not allow it to be published because I have done injustice to my Master. He never condemned anything or anybody. But while I was speaking of him, I criticized

2. Rem. p. 384.
3. LEW. p. 397.
4. LEW. p. 369.

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the American people for their dollar-worshipping spirit. That day I learnt the lesson that I am not yet fit to talk of him." (*Vedanta-Kesari*, Jan.-Feb. 1923). The idea of becoming great or famous never fascinated him. Another youth would have danced with joy at Ramakrishna's declaring him superior to stalwarts like Keshab Chandra Sen; but Vivekananda protested vigorously. To a request to write a biography of Ramakrishna to replied, "I cannot do it. In the hand of a bad artist even the picture of *Shiva* may appear to be that of a monkey. If God wishes it, somebody will accomplish it." On another occasion he said, "I am the disciple of a man who could not write his own name, but I am not worthy to unloose his shoes. How often I have wished that I could take this intellect and throw it in the *Ganga*!"

The predominant note of this master-mind is its inherent broad humanity and kindness. Universal love for humanity permeated his whole being; it was this love which prompted him, on reaching Trivandrum after two days of starvation, not to help himself before his Mohamedan companion was provided with food. It was this universal sympathy, boundless as the sky, which shot forth that half-humorous threat to the owner of an American hotel where a waitress had through mistake brought icecream soda in stead of icecream. "It you scold that girl I'll eat all the icecream sodas in this place," thundered Vivekananda.[5]

5. Rem. p. 376,

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12

LOVE OF HUMOUR

THE SEVERITY of Vivekananda's teaching had an inner lining of sparkling humour. He had a keen sense of humour which perceived moments and characteristics pregnant with laughter and utilized them to the delight of the company. In India the interlacing of spirituality and smile is well known, and a spiritual leader without laughter would almost be considered deficient. In the Western puritan circles, however, this laughing teacher sprang a pleasant surprise. Christopher Isherwood records his reaction to Vivekananda in the following words, "He appealed to me as the perfect anti-puritan hero: the enemy of Sunday religion, the destroyer of Sunday gloom, the schocker of prudes, the breaker of traditions, the outrager of conventions, the comedian who taught deepest truths in idiotic jokes and frightful puns. That humour had its place in religion, that it could actually be a mode of spiritual self-expression, was a revelation to me; for, like every small boy of Puritan upbringing, I had always longed to laugh out loudly and make improper noises in Church."[1]

The funny stories with which Vivekananda flavoured his teaching gained wide currency at the time. There were hundreds of them up his sleeve and he whipped out the appropriate ones

1. What Ved. Means to me, p. 47.

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to suit the context. His special stock of humorous tales about missionaries was most amusing. That preacher who went to the cannibals and asked them how his predecessor was, and got the answer that 'he was delicious!' Another story centered round the preacher who told the audience how God made Adam and put him up on the fence to dry. Someone interrupted him and doubted as to how the fence could come before Adam—"Oh! Such doubts will smash all theology," cried the startled preacher! Occasionally when some question about his adjusting to American circumstances arose, Vivekananda would burst out laughing, "Me Melican man now." Pressed to trace the origin of the funny phrase he would relate the story of the Chinese who, being accused of stealing pork, and hearing the remark of the judge that he believed the Chinese did not eat pork, gaily told him "Me Melican now."

Vivekananda was quick in spotting the funny and the ludicrous sides of things. He related how to a lady who asked him, "Are you a Buddist (pronouncing it as 'bud')?" he returned with gravity the reply, "No, Madam, I am a florist." To Trigunatitananda he writes in 1895, "By the bye, can't you shorten your name a bit? . . . . . a single name enough to fill a volume! Well, you hear people say that the Lord's name keeps away death. It is not the simple '*Hari*', mind you. It is those deep and sonorous names such as '*aghabhaganarakavinasana*' that put to rout King Death and his whole party."[2]

With a rich experience of contacts with all sorts of men and women he had several anecdotes full of practical humour. At the conclusion of a long talk on God, a lady naively asked, "Swami, have you seen God ?" Vivekananda beamed up and said, "Do I look like it—a big fat man like me?" Sometimes he recalled, "That lady who used to come to every meeting too late to hear a word but buttonholed me immediately after and kept me talking till a battle of Waterloo would be raging in my internal economy through hunger." A pastmaster of irony, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal, "Your *Bhaktiyoga* came out after a year's talk! Did you think the Western people would wait for it till Doomsday?"[3]

2. Lett. p. 198.
3. Lett. p. 347.

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Along with these naughty jokes goes a long train of the genial practical jokes he so often played. A learned doctor seriously remarked at the end of a morning class, "Well, it all amounts to this, I am *Brahman*, I am the Absolute." Imagine the peals of laughter which arose later at the dining table when the doctor's arrival synchronised with the Swami's mock-solemn declaration, "Here comes *Brahman*, here is the Absolute!" Whenever Vivekananda cooked for the company, his fun did not end with the strictly culinary part. In the end he would emerge with a napkin on arms and called in perfect imitation of the waiter on the dining car, "Last call for the dining car. Dinner served!" When a woman wondered if the Swami had seen the beautiful ladies of America and how they affected him, he replied, "If the most beautiful woman in the world were to look at me in an immodest or unwomanly way, she would immediately turn into a hideous, green frog, and one does not, of course admire frogs!" A lady chiropodist who had treated his foot occupied a small corner of his mind, for he often said, "My toe hurts every time I think of her."

A major subject of every genial humorist happens to be himself. While insisting that spiritual men are not severe and slim, he pointed to himself saying that they are fat like him. In a letter he writes, "Nowadays this fleshy tabernacle of mine is comparatively well". Of the irritation caused by fame he says humorously, "I cannot put the tip of my nose out into the streets, but there is a curious crowd!, Fame is not all milk and honey!! I am going to train a big beard! Now it is turning grey. It gives a venerable appearance...."

Vivekananda's love of humour was thus a lovable part of his charming personality.

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13

AS A CONVERSATIONALIST

THE TASK which Vivekananda set himself demanded superb ability as a conversationlist. After a lecture was over, he encouraged people to ask questions and these he answered. The gathering usually thinned down gradually and conversation on the topics discussed ensued. Quite often antagonists were present; his ability to control the gathering and to coax it to his view was strained to the last bit. But Vivekananda always stood the test comfortably adding by the score converts to his thought. A part of the secret lay in the serene attitude he scrupulously maintained in spite of provocations. Even before the Parliament of Religions he gave evidence of his calm braving of the storm of opposition in a meeting in a Church. 'Most of the ministers openly accosted him in the most acrimonious manner while he remained gentle in speech and manner. Vivekananda had learnt his lessons in patience with opponents during his tour of India. He was not interested in silencing the opponent; his efforts were directed to securing the opponent's active grasp of his thoughts and his practice thereof. He had formulated an interesting theory of humbling the opponents. He said that the best method to adopt was the one adopted by horse-trainers. When a trainer wants to break colts, he merely aims at first to get on their backs, and having secured a hold on the backs, limits his exertions to keeping his seat. He lets the colts try their best to throw him off and in that attempt to exhaust their untrained

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energies; but when the colts have done their best and failed, then begins the real task of the trainer. He becomes the master, and soon makes the colts feel that he means to be the master: and then the course of the trainer is comparatively smooth."[1]

He had early mastered the knack of talking to every person from that person's standpoint. He dished out the answers and thoughts to suit the questioner's taste and appetite. For instance, to a question, "Why to *Sannysins* idle away their time in this way?" which naturally presupposed an empirical line of thought he replied, " Now, look here. You are earning this money with such struggle, of which,only a little portion you spend on yourself; and some of it you spend for others who, think, are your own... When you die, somebody else will enjoy it all; and perchance, he will abuse you for not having accumulated more... On the other hand, I do nothing; when I feel hungry, I let others know by gestures that I want food; and I eat whatever I get... Now, tell me who is the wiser—You or I?" When his host enquired whether Vivekananda felt exhausted by a long discussion, he calmly replied, "My son, would you have offered me even a morsel of food, if I had kept mum, the out-and-out utilitarians that you are?"

Of course, such placid arguments easily made room for hard-hitting rejoinders whenever occasion demanded. American newspapers readily greeted Vivekananda's presence of mind and ready wit. 'The Iowa State Register' says, "But woe to the man who undertook to combat the monk on his own ground. His replies came like flashes of lightning and the venturesome questioner was sure to be impaled on the Indian's shining intellectual lance. The workings of his mind, so subtle and so brilliant, so well stored and so well trained, sometimes dazzled his hearers, but it was always a most interesting study."[2] A more concrete analysis says, "He had been brought up amidst polemics, and his habit of argument was mainly Socratic, beginning insidiously and simply by a story, or clear statement of some incontestable fact, and then from that deriving strange and unanswerable

1. Rem. p. 59.
2. LEW. p. 317.

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things. All through, his discourses abounded in picturesque illustrations and beautiful legends."[3]

His inimitable knack of humbling obstinate opponents in conversation was in evidence in his early Indian career. At Jaipur, a learned Sardar remarked, "Swamiji, I am a *Vedantist*. I do not believe in the special divinity of incarnations. We are all *Brahman*. What is the difference between me and an incarnation?" Vivekananda replied, "Yes, that is quite true. The Hindus count fish, tortoise and boar as incarnations. You say that you are also an incarnation. But with which of these do you feel yourself as one?" A spontaneous peal of laughter completed the debacle of the questioner. At Pondicherry Vivekananda encountered a bigoted *pundit* who held that sea-voyage was a sin. To the former's entreaties he vehemently cried every time '*Kadapi na, Kadapi na*' (never, never). At last Vivekananda silenced him by crying probably in a louder voice, "What do you mean? It is the duty of every Hindu to test the rules of religion on the touchstone of Western science, and to visit other countries to compare notes." To another youth who complained that he found no time for the daily religious chore, Vivekananda thundered, "What! Those giants of old, who never walked but strode, of whom if you were but to think for a moment you would be shrivelled into a moth, they, Sir, had time, and you have no time!"[4] It was at Madras that a College teacher, an atheist, came to argue with Vivekananda and became his ardent disciple. Vivekananda called him Kidi and said, "Kidi came, he saw and he *was* conquered."

A stormy apostle when facing opponents, Vivekananda was most pleasant and lovable when conversing with admirers and sympathisers. The 'Avalanche' of Detroit said on 16th January 1894, "In conversation he is a most pleasant gentleman; his choice of words are the gems of the English language, and his general bearing ranks him with the most cultured people of Western etiquette and custom. As a companion he is a most charming man, and as a conversationalist, he is perhaps not surpassed in the drawing-rooms of any city in the Western

3. LEW. p. 410.
4. LEW. p. 268.

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world".[5] In one siting his mood often underwent quite a few changes. In a moment he would be bubbling with boyish laughter and in the next he startled by seriously making some complicated philosophical point. The celebrated singer, Madame E. Calve, who had found solace in Vivekananda's words in the sore hour of a peronal loss, described how the time-schedule of their carefully chalked-out jouney in Europe was often thwarted due to the irresistible attraction of Vivekananda's talk. "The Swami was always absorbingly interesting even under ordinary conditions. He fascinated his hearers with his magic tongue. Again and again we would miss our train, sitting calmly in a station waiting-room, enthralled by his discourse and quite oblivious of the lapse of time..... We would in consequence find ourselves stranded far from our destination at the most inconvenient times and places."[6]

As a story-teller Vivekananda was superb. He entered into the spirit of the story he told and it re-live. His broad outlook could feel the grandeur of the heroes of all relions. He was a devout Christian while discoursing on Christ, a sincere Mohamedan when dilating on the teachings of Mohamed and his veneration for Buddha was most ardent. Prahlada, Sibi and Nachiketas were his favourite heroes. The list of his heroes was not confined to religion. He was moved to the depths of his being when he talked on the Rani of Jhansi, Prithviraj, Akbar, Napoleon and Shivaji. Especially when he was travelling waves of feeling in unison with the places visited arose in him and he transmitted these to those present. Sister Nivedita, Madame Calve and others have left graphic descriptions of his story—telling faculty at its highest during his journeys. "How many points on the map have received a new beauty in my eyes, from the conversations they recall!" says Nivedita, "On the morning of our passing through the straits of Gibralter, he met me with the words, 'Have you seen them? Have you seen them?—Landing there and crying, 'Din! Din! The Faith! The Faith!" And for half-an-hour I was swept away into his dramatisation if the Moorish invasions of Spain." Strange affinity in the heart of a Bengali Hindu born in distant Calcutta for the Moors far-off in time and space! Was it a manifestation of the universal affinity he as a *Vedantist* felt?"

5. SVA. p. 149.
6. Rem. p. 268.

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14

AS AN ORATOR

THE VICTORIES on the American platform brought Vivekananda into limelight. His first impact in the West was as an inspired speaker. His voice was perfectly attuned to the thought he expressed. No pen can suggest the thrill he created in the mind of the hearer. The infinite pathos that attended his simple, piercing utterances like "we infinite dreamers—dream finite dreams" was soul-stirring. "They are mistaken who say that a voice is nothing—that ideas are all." Says Nivedita, "For his voice in its rise and fall was the only possible music to the poetry of words—making the whole hour a pause, retreat, in the market-place of life." Large audiences were filled with his rich, vibrant, sonorous voice and every listener was individually conscious of an electrifying presence. It was his liquid voice that helped him establish a relation with every listener personally.

Vivekananda always spoke extempore. In India, the Western custom of reading out speeches has not yet cut much ice. We cannot somehow digest the spectacle of a speaker reading from a prepared text, it seems a contradiction in terms. Even on academic platforms a speaker who does not speak but reads out, hardly makes a better impression than a clever primary scholar who has assimilated the first rassiduously; and the speaker being past the proper age cannot win admiration for

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that. Vivekananda could not have prepared texts even if he had wanted to, for the simple lack of armies of secretaries and stenographers. Further, his schedule was too busy for that. But one could not imagine him reading from a text; he was too agile and unconventional for that. A clergyman remarked on his address at Ballon Society, London, in 1895, that Vivekananda had better read his lecture. Imagine the blaze in the Swami's eyes who "made such a fiery speech that the clergyman was nowhere. . . . . He replied to the objections of the clergyman categorically one by one, recited the sonorous *Vedic* hymn (*Suparnam* etc.) and ended with a triumphant peroration".[1]

His manner on the platform radiated competence and confidence. One could not imagine anything less than a glorious, constant cataract of words and ideas once he stood up on the dais. In the famous phrase of 'The New York Herald Tribune' he was 'an orator by divine right.' His performance on the dais conformed to its own regulations, it was most unconventional. He often paced the platform with his arms crossed on the chest as in his well-known picture. Sometimes he looked upwards and at other times he intently gazed at the audience trying to envelope it, as it were, in his large rolling eyes. His gestures were gorgeous. He often waved his hands, and stopped to chant '*Shiva*! *Shiva*!' A placid flow of his words was no guarantee of what would follow; sometimes thunderous outbursts followed on its heels. The audience invariably listened to him with rapt attention; it had no other choice than to be spellbound. He never had to face the problem of controlling the audience; it was always enthralled.

Vivekananda never claimed originality for his thoughts. Is truth not as hoary as the boundless sky? But he advocated the need of repeating and emphasizing truth. "At one of the London meetings a white-haired well-known philosopher said to the Swami, 'You have spoken splendily, sir, and I thank you heartily, but you have told us nothing new.' The Lecturer's sonorous tones rang through the room in reply, 'Sir, I have told you the Truth. That, the truth, is as old as the immemorial hills, ... as old as the great God. If I have told it in such

1. Rem. p. 302.

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words as will make you think, make you live up to your thinking, do I not do well in telling it?' The murmur of 'hear! hear!' and the louder clapping of hands showed how completely the Swami had carried the audience with him."[2]

The infinite variety this truth assumed on the Swami's tongue was surely amazing. Often he had to repeat his discourses on request, but they were never mere repetitions. Every time he repeated the theme, it was under a different grab that he clothed it, although the audience could be content with a mere repetition. A natural, effortless variety was the keynote of his lectures. The Sanskrit verses, followed by their simple, direct and ready translation provided welcome breaks. Was it not therefore strange for Vivekananda to complain that public lecturing "was killing? At Eight o'clock I am to speak on 'Love'; at eight o' clock I do not feel like love!" Indeed he embraced renunciation for freedom and he was in chains. He had no regard for work in allegiance to the clock. His lectures were to begin at scheduled hours, but the closing time was not subject to anything but his own next engagement.

No wonder that the effect of his speeches was electrifying. In some cases the effect was fantastic. "There were some among his hearers who were literally exhausted," says a disciple. "In one case I know of a man who was forced to rest in bed for three days as the result of a shock received by a discussion with the Swami.[3] The influence he radiated from the platform verily permeated deep; several men who heard him in England and America later visited him in India. A colonel in the Indian army who had heard him in England met him in a train on way to Lahore, and respectfully held the door for him on the Lahore platform to the pleasant surprise of all. The impression he made on the platform in England thus made it felt on the railway platform in India!

And let it be remembered that this skilled orator ridiculed 'those long lectures!' All that could be said about religion, he

2. LEW p. 415.
3. LEW p. 400.

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said, could be counted on a few fingers. It was the man that grew out of the lectures that was important, the lectures were not. Vivekananda's work only started with his oratory, did not end with it; his eloquence was harnessed as a handmaid to his work.

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15

HIS YOGIC POWERS

In The common mind spiritual attainments are always attended by miraculous powers. The proof of the pudding of spiritual progress is, in the common man's view, in the eating of demonstrations of abnormal powers. Man cannot complete the eulogy of one he thinks spiritually great without alluding to his astonishing powers giving solace to devotees. On the heels of realisation of God must follow miracles—that is the commonly accepted sequence.

Vivekananda disavowed miracles with all the vehemence at his command. In his interview to the "Detroit News" he said, "We do not recognise such a thing as miracles. There are wonders wrought beyond our five senses, but they are operated by some law. Our religion has nothing to do with them. Most of the strange things are not the performances of the wise men. These do not go about the country performing their wonders."[1] When a lady asked him whether he could perform wonderful tricks, and if he had been buried alive as a part of his installation in the Brotherhood, his answer was a positive negative. "What have these things to do with religion?" he asked, "Do they make a man purer? The Satan of your Bible is powerful but differs from God in not being pure."

Vivekananda himself was nevertheless credited with Yogic powers. Since his early youth he had the power of reading the

1. SVA p. 216.

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physical and mental characteristics of a person by tearing into fine bits a letter written by him and looking intently into them. Ramakrishna had advised him to use this gift only for the good of mankind. Later, he acquired the power of transmitting during the state of meditation acute sensations through touch. Once he asked Abhedananda to touch him and passed into meditation. Abhedananda touched him on the knee and felt a shock as though from an electric battery. Later Ramakrishna again reprimanded Vivekananda for flittering away his energies before accumulating enough.

At the time of the passing away of Ramakrishna in 1886 Vivekananda had mastered several Yogic powers and could use them with discretion. In his subsequent historic journeys in India, there were some occasions when his powers were evident. At Jaipur, Hari Singh, the State Commander-in-Chief, did not believe in the efficacy of image-worship. One day, an image of Shri Krishna was being carried with ceremony by some devotees. Vivekananda touched Hari Singh and told him, "Look there, see the living God!" No sooner did Hari Singh's eyes fall upon the image than tears of ecstasy rolled down his cheeks. He exclaimed, "Well, Swamiji, that was a revelation to me. What I could not understand after hours of discussion was easily comprehended through your touch. Verily I saw the Lord in the image of Krishna!"[2]

The part played by Vivekananda in Madame E. Calve's life throws a flood of light on the working of his powers and how he chose to use them. The lady's account of her first meeting with him makes a most interesting reading. "It has been my good fortune and my joy to know a man who truly walked with God, a noble being, a Saint, a philosopher, and a true friend. . . He was lecturing in Chicago (in 1895) when I was there; and as I was at that time greatly depressed in mind and body, I decided to go to him, having seen how he had helped some of my friends. An appointment was arranged for me and when I arrived at his house, I was immediately ushered into his study. . . . After a pause he spoke without looking up. 'My child', he said, 'what a troubled atmosphere you have about you. Be calm: it is essential. Then in a quiet voice, untroubled and

2. LEW p. 216.

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aloof, this man who did not even know my name talked to me of my secret problems and anxieties. He spoke of things that I thought were unknown even to my nearest friends. It seemed miraculous, supernatural. 'How do you know all this?' I asked at last, 'who has talked of me to you?' 'No one has talked to me', he answered gently, 'Do you think that is necessary? I read in you as in an open book'. . . . I became once again vivacious and cheerful, thanks to the effect of his powerful will. He did not use any of the ordinary hypnotic or mesmeric influences. It was the strength of his character, the purity and intensity of his purpose, that carried conviction."[3]

Vivekananda utilized his Yogic powers sparingly and benevolently. He used them especially to sift his visitors and choose his disciples. Sister Christine describes how he did this: ". . . he added rather shyly, 'I have a power which I seldom use: the power of reading the mind. If you will permit me, I should like to read your mind, as I wish to initiate you with the others tomorrow.' We assented joyfully. Evidently he was satisfied with the result of the reading, for the next day, together with several others, he gave us a *mantra* (a sacred hymn for chanting,) and made us his disciples . . . Important as well as minor events were foretold for us nearly all of which have come to pass. In this reading the quality of the personality was revealed—the mettle, the capacity, the character."[4] Viraji Devi relates how on Vivekananda's addressing her with the simple words, 'well, Madame', "I could not speak but began to weep and kept on weeping as though the flood gates had been opened . . . as I went from his presence, my problems were solved and my questions answered, though he had not asked me anything."[5] Another incident related by T.J. Desai is a pointer to Vivekananda's wonderful power of infusing knowledge through word. Desai asked him a question regarding the identity of the individual soul with the universal soul and the Swami simply cried out, 'Thou art that'! No further explanation was necessary.

3. Rem. p. 266.
4. Rem. p. 170.
5. Rem. p. 395.

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16

AS A TEACHER

WITH VIVEKANANDA'S role as a teacher is related the subtle inner conflict of personal salvation with rendering help to others. Vivekananda's ideals had already assumed social significance, but at times the urge to withdraw in seclusion and be immersed individually in bliss became strong. In this conflict of the teacher versus the *Yogi* the teacher always triumphed, but the battles fought were quite a few. In his meditation classes in America, he would often himself meditate and it would be quite a job bringing him back to normalcy. A teacher should be less a scholar, and more a teacher; this he verily knew, for he instructed his disciples how to bring him back from *Samadhi* (union with the Absolute).

A great disciple alone becomes a great teacher. Vivekananda was a great disciple; he was a wonderful teacher. His arms were open to embrace every sincere person; he was a veritable ocean of mercy. When in America he was advised to choose only the 'right sort of persons' for his training, but he summarily refused the idea. He lays down that it is the teacher's job to transform an unrighteous person into one of the right sort. Indeed if one already belongs to the right sort one would not need any guidance.

Once he accepted a person as a disciple, his love for him knew no bounds. He considered him part of his own existence

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and cared for every trifle he would need. He writes to Nivedita, "I am intensely personal in my love, having the power to pluck out my own heart with my own hand, if it becomes necessary." From the day he made his first disciple at Hathras, every moment of his life was a noble sacrifice at the altar of man-making. His first disciple, Sadananda, could not check his tears whenever he related the story of how he fainted with hunger and thirst, and the Swami cared for him and undoubtedly saved him from certain death. "How can I describe him, friends," he said, "except by the words Love, Love, Love? When I was too ill to do anything but stagger along, he carried my personal belongings, including my shoes."

The criterions used by Vivekananda for admitting aspiring persons to his discipleship were purity of character and renunciation. No worldly considerations influenced him in this regard. In New York there was a group of poor miserable creatures who clung to him with pathetic tenacity. He attended to their needs. Some of his associates thought this very queer. But he said humorously, "These are *Shiva's* demons", and continued his affectionate treatment of them. A disciple avers, "There was one prominent feature of Swamiji's life which speaks to me volumes about his renunciation. I mean his dealing with rich men. The treatment which he used to give his rich disciples did not in the least differ from that given to his most insignificant Indian disciples."

Vivekananda employed a variety of methods in imparting instruction to his disciples. He would especially follow the method of learning through mistakes. He would encourage the pupils to ask questions and himself asked them questions. In the discussion he would allow the disciples to flounder about and would at an opportune moment start cross-examining them. This cross-examination conducted like an astruse pleader led to the true solution of the problem. He transmitted strength and courage to the disciples. To a lady mourning a great personal loss, he told, "You do not weep, madam, because you want to. You weep because nature forces you. When nature says, 'weep!' say, 'No. I shall not weep.'" Such statements vitalised by his tremendous personality placed him in the same class with the world's greatest spiritual teachers.

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Vivekananda's methods of teaching differed in different cases. With some disciples he was extremely strict. Incessant hammering about their dress, diet and conversation was undertaken by him is such cases. In the case of some other disciples he did not encourage asceticism. Loving ridicule was the weapon used to remove idiosyncrasies of temperament and thought. In other cases, gentle, soothing, sincere advice acted as the agent. As soon as he was confronted with an inquisitive visitor Vivekananda gauged his or her mental acumen and adopted his method of approach suitably. His teaching was interspersed with singing. Once a visitor wanting to know something about Buddha's renunciation was addressed by Vivekananda in song, quoting some verses from '*Lalitavistara*'; the istener was visibly moved by the singing and later grasped to his satisfaction the crux of renunciation. Vivekananda did not permit householders to embrace *Sannyasa*. To an American housewife his advice was, "Find God in your husband and family; that is your path at present."

The training of the disciples entailed quite some strain. In the case of the Western disciples the training constituted two processes; the process of unlearning much that they had learned, of getting rid of some preconceptions, and that of learning about India and Hindu Philosophy. Sister Nivedita's trials from which she emerged the worthy spiritual daughter of Vivekananda have been graphically narrated. "He had not the slightest respect for her instinctive national loyalty, for her habits, for her dislikes as a Westerner; he constantly humiliated her proud and logical English character. Perhaps in this way he wished to defend himself and her against the possionate adoration she had for him; although Nivedita's feelings for him were always absolutely pure, he perhaps saw their danger. He snubbed her mercilessly and found fault with all she did. She came back to her companions, overwhelmed and in tears. Eventually they remonstrated with Vivekananda for the excessive severity, and from that time it was softened, and light entered Nivedita's heart."[1]

1 . LVR p. 16.

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The only parallel his love for the disciples would bear was their love for him. They loved him, served him, and cared for his slightest convenience. Even a simple cook remarked about the adoration shown by the American diciples, "The respect and devotion which these *Memsahibs* show the Swami are far greater than any disciple shows his religious preceptor." The disciples even forgot everything about realisation in their devotion for Vivekananda. In a beautiful, tender letter Nivedita quotes the poet Ram Prashad, "I do not want to become sugar; I want to eat sugar," and continues, "I do not want even to know God in any way; even to think of such things is ridiculous of course—that would not leave my Father unattainably above .....Even knowledge of God seems too much like a return of benefits. One longs to serve for serving's sake, for ever and ever, dear Master, not for one miserable little life."[2]

Mrs. Funke was especially aware of the teacher's need of rest. She would tell funny stories, often at her own cost, and divert his mind. Vivekananda remarked once, "She rests me." She once said, "I know he thinks I am a fool but I don't care as long as it amuses him." Such was her grand concept of service! His disciples offered him even menial service. Once he said to an American disciple, "You see how they serve me! To a westerner this devotion may seen servile, and you may be shocked at the way I accept all this service without remonstrance. But you must understand the Indian idea, then everything will be clear to you. This service of the *guru* is one of the means by which the disciple progresses in spirituality."[3]

His meteoric rise as a teacher did not affect his genuine humility. Realising and saying always that he was only an instrument, he considered himself an humble servant of God. When Nivedita asked for his blessings on the eve of her departure for England on a tour to solicit help, he blessed her, "If I made you, perish, if mother made you, live!" On another

2. Rem. p. 288.
3. LEW p. 203.

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occasion, he uttered a famous sentence which not only indicated his complete abnegation of pride, but showed that he had achieved the ideal every teacher and public worker should aspire for; "The shadow of a big tree will not let the smaller trees grow up. I must go to make room."

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17

AS A PATRIOT

PATRIOTISM was the sole basis of Vivekananda's public work. He had intense love for the motherland and its teeming millions. The burning awareness of the miserable condition of his countrymen informed his thoughts and actions even in the thick of his Western work. His was not an easy-chair patriotism, a comfortable indulgence to be conceded in times of leisure. His sympathy for the down—trodden went far deeper than the lips. Numerous occasions are on record when he could not check his tears on seeing or hearing about suffering Indians. Even in the midst of glory, an undercurrent of active affection for his brethren informed his activities.

On a few occasions Vivekananda's associates insisted that patriotism was a Western and modern ideal and a man wanting God should have no truck with such sentiments and ideals as patriotism, and social service. The narrow foundation of such a conception can very well be seen. Vivekananda did not object to a man's spiritual longing operating exclusively in the field of worship of god; he contended that realising God through serving man was as valid a path as the path of exclusive spiritual practices, if not more. He further contended that Ramakrishna insisted on his disciples following the first path that being the need of the hour. These ideals of patriotism were already deeply embedded in Vivekananda's heart long before he left for America. It is therefore not true either to term them

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Western or to search for their origin in Vivekananda's mind in his contact with the he West. A pleader in Bhagalpur tells us, "I discovered that the soul of his teaching was an intense and unselfish patriotism with which he invested and vivified his subjects. This was an abiding characteristic with him. When I read the growing descriptions of the success he won at the Chicago parliament of Religions, I felt that in him India had found her man."[1]

Vivekananda always felt the need to rewrite the history of India. The lack of self-confidence among Indians was pinned down by him to absence of presentation of India's past in a correct and inspiring perspective. "It is for Indians to write Indian history," he often said. Himself a keen student of history he never lost an opportunity of pointing out distortions in India's past introduced by foreign writers intentionally and unintentionally. Vivekananda's patriotism always yearned to assume a concrete and useful form, and whenever he came in contact with young admirers he not only infused the spirit of patriotism in them, but directed that spirit into such channels as study of national history, study of Sanskrit texts, serving the poor etc.

Vivekananda could never bear any attempt at tarnishing the fair name of India. On several occasions he vehemently attacked foreigners who would express contempt for India. When he was travelling to India after his first sojourn in the West, he met two Christian missionaries on the ship. They talked maliciously about India and Hindu religion. "The Swami stood it as long as he could; walking close to one of the speakers he suddenly seized him quietly but firmly by the collar and said, half-humorously and half-grimly, 'If you abuse my religion again I'll throw you overboard.' The frightened missionary 'shook in his boots' and said under his breath, 'Let me go, Sir, I'll never do it again.' From that time he was most obsequious to the Swami on all occasions and endeavoured to remedy his misbehaviour by exceeding kindness." Here perhaps we know why Vivekananda laid so much stress on physical strength and connected it invariably with patriotism.

1. LEW. p. 193.

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18

AS A FRIEND

To Several persons Vivekananda was a friend in need. He was unselfish and always cared for the other person and not for himself. His friendship was therefore treasured as an invaluable asset by all his intimate associates. Constance Towne, an American lady, writes about her friendship with him, "Ours was a great friendship, and fancy the only one that remains unpublished to the world. It was purely of the spirit, absolutely apart from the material loves and hates. He spoke always of when and what and where our souls would be ultimately, where in that other realm. He never spoke of me to anyone, nor mentioned my name. It was a friendship of spirit. It still is."[1] This experience was shared by all his friends.

The love of Vivekananda for his friends was more profound than that subsisting between the nearest human relations. The line between his disciples and friends was not always very clear —cut so far as distribution of his love was concerned. The disciples were intent primarily on learning from him and the friends were content with soul-to-soul association. Vivekananda never directly prompted a friend into discipleship; but examples of friends later becoming disciples like Landsberg (Kripananda) are not wanting. The love of the teacher and that of the friend were nevertheless always sincere and inclined towards giving

1. *Rem. p. 257.*

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rather than taking. When, for example, Mrs. Ole Bull returned to Vivekananda the sum given by him, he writes with feeling, "A Hindu son never lends to his mother but the mother has every right over the son and so the son in the mother. I am very much offended at your offering to repay me the nasty few dollars. I can never repay my debts to you."[2]

Such overpowering love was sometimes directed by Vivekananda to melting his friend's firm mind. Turiyananda was much given to secluded observance of meditation and other religious practices. He was not inclined to carry on the public work started by Vivekananda. "At last one day, in Darjeeling, when all arguments had failed, the Swami put his arms round his *Gurubhai's* neck and laying his head against his breast, wept like a child, saying, 'Dear Haribhai (earlier name of Turiyananda), can't you see me laying down my life inch by inch in fulfilling this mission of my Master, till I have come to the very verge of death! Can you look on without helping by relieving me of a part of my great burden?' The *Gurubhais* was overpowered. All hesitation vanished. Then and there he pledged himself to do unflinchingly the Swami's bidding. So it was that he took the work in the West as the will of the Mother and resigned himself to the task."[3]

Sister Christine has given a touching account of his small charities. She says, "(He inspired) nothing but heart and devotion. So even in small things while he was still in America. Thus, when asked why he was taking French lessons, he said in confusion, 'This is the only way M.L. can keep from starving.' Thrusting a ten-dollar bill into the hand of another he said, 'give this to S....., do not say it is from me'. When one of the group, a weak brother, was accused of juggling with the *Vedanta* Society's money, he said, 'I will make good any deficiency.' Then the matter was dropped and he said to one of the others 'I do not know where I could have found the money to make, up the loss, but I could not let the poor suffer.'[4] On another occasion in India, a youth looked at the gold chain

2. Let. p. 123.
3. LEW p. 645.
4. Rem: p. 216.

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round Vivekananda's neck tied to the gold watch in his pocket, and remarked that the chain was lovely. The Swami said with a smile, 'Do you like it?', and passed the watch with the chain to the trembling hand of the youth. The amazed youth seemed not to know what to do, but the gift was complete. Without the slightest attachment Vivekananda parted with an object significant not only for its value but for the memory of the person who had given it. It was a simple attempt on his part to contribute to the joy of an acquaintance. To the cook of his host in Madras in 1892, he gave away his beautiful smoking pipe given to him by the Maharaja of Mysore. The pipe was among his few comforts. In America a youth admired his carved staff which had served him as the only companion in his tours of India. He remarked, "What you admire is already yours!" and the staff changed hands. Wherever he went he induced other people to give away money to a good cause. Thus at Alwar he instructed his admirers to finance the thread-ceremony and education of a poor boy, and the very first sentence in the first letter he wrote back after leaving Alwar contained an enquiry regarding the thread-ceremony!

It would be fitting to conclude this section to the note of Vivekananda's readiness to own up what he deemed rashness. He writes to Balaram Bose, "You specially are given to plain-speaking, and chary of making large promises—things that sometimes make me cross with you. But upon reflection I find that it is you that have acted with discretion."[5]

5. *Let. p. 27.*

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19

VIVEKANANDA'S ROLE IN THE NATIONAL RENAISSANCE

IN INDIA politics was never divested of its religious and spiritual background, and the national resurgence covered both these fields, and more gloriously the field of religion. The resilience which has stamped pages of India's history was in evidence again. Vivekananda heralded in 1893 this era of unmixed pride in the national heritage, and his impact is echoed later by as eminent a leader as Gandhi who on January 30, 1921, "went on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Belur for the anniversary festival of Vivekananda's birth; and from the balcony of his room declared to the people his veneration for the great Hindu, whose word had lighted in him the flame of love for India."[1] Jawaharlal Nehru avers in his 'Autobiography', "We comforted ourselves in our misfortune and degradation with the notion that though we did not possess the outward show and glitter of the West, we had the real inner article which was far more valuable and worth having. Vivekananda and others, as well as the interest of Western scholars in our old philosophies gave us a measure of self-respect again and roused up our dormant pride in our past." In the words of Tilak, 'Vivekananda played the role Sankara played in the eighth century.'

1. LVR p. 378 fn.

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The emergence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy marked the first major departure from this dull acceptance of Western superiority; he was the instrument of the beginning of resilience. A versatile genius with an overpowering zest for life, he had a giant intellect reinforced by cool courage and a feeling heart. Looking from this distance now, the most fundamental task he accomplished seems to be his unambiguous proclamation of the superb greatness of Hindu philosophy, of the *Upanishads* and of *Advaita*. He openly accused the British Government of going back on their assurance of noninterference in religious matters and of staging a back-door entry in the guise of the missionaries. The climax of this conflict was marked by the repulsive request made to him by Bishop Middleton to embrace Christianity followed by Ram Mohan's angry rejection thereof. Ram Mohan translated the commentary of Sankara on the *Vedanta-Sutras* and some *Upanishads*. He opposed imageworship and maintained that God was one and service of man was the only way to worship Him. It was to propagate this 'reformed' religion that Ram Mohan founded the *Brahmo Samaj*. He called himself a Hindu Unitarian and believed strongly in sifting chaff from grain in Hinduism and in the supreme value of the grain.

On the social front his relentless efforts to bring into force reforms like abolition of *Sati* calculated to emancipate women and the masses were memorable. Ram Mohan was a reformer par excellence. In the field of education he advocated the need of imparting modern liberal instruction. He opposed the Government's plan to start old-fashioned educational institutions and welcomed instead up-to-date instruction in sciences and industry. He published a periodical in Bengali which he later closed down as a protest against the censorship Act of 1820.

It would be interesting to take note of a contemporary development in Maharashtra. In Bombay Vishnubuwa Brahmachari (1825-1871), an ardent believer in *Vedanta*, lectured eloquently and effectively countered missionary propaganda. He emphasized the need for religion and his religious discourses were broad-based enough to admit discussion of poverty of the people and like issues. A fervent longing for God inspired

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the activities of this *Sannyasin* who was equal to any in his sincerity and vision, but was only less widely known.

In Maharashtra, the situation was very much different from that in Bengal. Having seen and enjoyed political independence for quite a few years before it was wrested by the British, Maharashtra very soon began to seethe in anger at the foreign domination; the glamour of the British rule could not arrest its eye for long. Thinkers in Maharashtra saw through the wicked economic exploitation carried on by the British. The missionary attack on religion not being so marked, there was no dazzling reaction in the religious field. The *Prarthana Samaj* always remained an organisation of limited appeal. Discussions on religion and spiritualism there were quite a few. Leaders like Lokamanya Tilak were intensely religious; but the approach of these thinkers was rather intellectual and scholarly and a restless unearthly passion for God was not in evidence in their activity.

The advent of Swami Dayananda Sarasvati (1824 to 1883) and of the Theosophical Society were events of supreme significance in contemporary national life. Repulsed by the sight of a rat eating the offering to an image and restless with an intense passion to know God, Dayananda underwent arduous apprenticeship for fifteen years, and was convinced that the truth of *Arya Dharma* is embedded in the *Vedas* and *Vedas* alone, and imageworship and all later developments were fit to be scrapped. Endowed with a fearless courage of conviction, Dayananda met the orthodox Hindu *Pandits* at Varanasi in 1869 and in a Homeric contest tore to shreds their arguments supporting caste by birth, restrictions on women and *Sudras*, etc. He met Ramakrishna in 1873. In 1875 he founded the *Arya Samaj* at Bombay, which later spread mainly to Panjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Leaders of the *Arya Samaj*, Lala Lajpatrai, the famed political leader associated with Tilak, Swami Shraddhananda of revered memory, who was murdered by a fanatic, and Lala Hansraj, were particularly busy in opening educational institutions working on the lines of the time-honoured *ashramas* of India.

To turn now to the direct and immediate spiritual heritage of Vivekananda—Shri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna was a man

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of God. He had seen God and had realised God-hood. Yearning possionately for God since childhood he underwent series of austerities and wept incessantly for God. He was one of those great beacon-lights of humanity who are unable to bear the base fallacy of God discussed in every square but discovered nowhere. He rejected God, the fiction and sought God the fact, and discovered Him everywhere. He never referred to contemporary issues; his life was bathed in spirituality, and he expressed himself only on issues relating to human behaviour and realisation of God. He was therefore a whole trend by himself and to search for his similars one would rightly turn to a Buddha, or a Chaitanya or a Jnanesvara.

The relations of Vivekananda with Ramakrishna have already been discussed. The illustrious tradition seems to have become dim after the untimely demise of Swami Ramtirtha in 1906, of Shri Aurobindo in 1949 and of Shri Ramana Maharshi in 1951. Aurobindo was the celebrated leader of resurgent nationalism in Bengal and insisted on sinking the roots of political activity in spirituality. In 1909, in order to escape the clutches of the British rulers, he retired for good to Pondichery where he established a powerful spiritual centre, which rapidly cultivated contacts the world over. He wrote volumes giving a full exposition of *Vedanta* in the context of the progress of human knowledge in various branches of enquiry.

Thus in the world of Indian spiritual thought of the nineteenth century two main currents are discernible. The first constituted by Ram Mohan Roy and his followers in Bengal, and Bhandarkar, Ranade and their lieutenants in Maharashtra, re-examined the ancient tenets and practices of Hinduism and, more and less, reaffirmed them making significant exceptions in the case of practices. Theirs was mainly an intellectual approach and the passionate yearning for realisation of the ultimate truth was not very much evident in them. Staunch orthodox Hindus like Lokamanya Tilak, whose approach was also intellectual, differed from these thinkers in accepting most of the practices in Hinduism and exploring their rational basis. The second current constituted by sages like Dayananda sought religion in realisation, and reached its deepest depth in Ramakrishna. These spiritual stalwarts functioned mostly in the spiritual realm and

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devotion and faith in the *Vedas* characterised their approach. In Vivekananda both these currents fused beautifully, the blazing sun of rationality transmitting a pleasant lustre to the sweet moon of ardent passion for God. In his hands secular knowledge reinforced spiritual knowledge, spiritually assumed social garb. Vivekananda's life mission thus marked the culmination of a great process which started with Ram Mohan Roy and pointed to Aurobindo. Vivekananda re-established the hoary wisdom of Bharat, reconciled it with modern thought. Firmly wedded to intellect and reason he exploded the bubble of endless speculation and equated religion with realisation. The modern prophet of an ageless religion, he reinforced the bonafides of spiritualism, and marked the superb confluence of the two powerful currents, one originating in Ram Mohan and the other in Ramakrishna and Dayananda.

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20

BONA-FIDES OF SPIRITUALISM

AND VIVEKANANDA insists that the inner urge to know the unknown is only natural; it is firmly embedded in the human mind and it is this aspect of existence that distinguishes man from the animals. Vivekananda reasons out this urge by maintaining that 'the present, the expressed, is only one part of the unexpressed.' Even the simplest object we use is part of an unknown fund of that object. The tap-water in the bath-room presupposes an inexhaustible source of water. The breakfast eaten in the morning is only a portion of the food-content in the world. This kind of awareness is keenly felt in the field of abstract knowledge. Even the greatest doctrines in the world of thought enunciated by giants like Newton and Einstein have undergone modifications for the simple reason that they were parts of the truth and parts can never be final. Scientific discoveries and inventions are but newer susceptibilities of the material universe tapped and utilized by man; the universe is similarly susceptible in many more ways unknown today but knowable. Modern science therefore calls no doctrine 'truth', every doctrine is part of the truth, an approach to the truth, or at best relatively true, that is, true with reference to the available data. In other words, the known in the physical world is a projection of the unknown but knowable according to the belief of the scientist. The range of the naked physical sense-organs

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of man is ridiculously small. When we see one side of a wall, we cannot see the opposite side; for its knowledge we have either to use a contrivance like a mirror or depend on an inner aid like memory. The moment man will give up this aid, he will degenerate into animalhood; but he is fortunately unable by his very nature to do so. When the outer sense-organs function in a very limited sphere, it is only natural that the inner organ, namely the intellect, works in a strictly restricted field, and that is why a thought grasped by one man is not necessarily comprehended similarly by another; that is why when it comes to considering an idea from a view-point not his own, man's intellect is at its weakest; and that is again the reason why there are nearly as many opinions as there are men expressing them on any subject not directly comprehended by the outer sense-organs.

Another significant feature of the process of knowledge is that as we delve deep into any branch of knowledge we go from the grosser to the less gross, and then from the gross to the fine, until a stage is reached when the fine is so fine that it defies all perception and identification, when, in effect, the known merges into the unknown. "Take anything before you," says Vivekananda, "the most material thing; take one of the most material sciences as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology, study it, push the study forward and forward and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics in every department of knowledge."[1]

Vivekananda claims in a succinct analysis that the doctrine of the unknown as the basis and source of the known is a pre-eminently Hindu doctrine. He relates the legend of the *Brahmin* who, on being told by Socrates that the greatest study for mankind is man, questioned him by way of reply, "How can you know man until you know God?" The quest of the unknown extending into the pre-birth and the post-death eras naturally finds place in every human mind. In the case of a few

1. SPR p. 3.

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intellectuals it takes the form of a philosophical enquiry; the greatest among these concentrate on the enquiry with such a zeal that they acquire great power of the mind. These are the greatest spiritual giants like *Suka* whose "mind could not be attracted by anything in the world unless he allowed it to affect him."[2]

The inevitable call of the unknown is thus unalienably tied with human existence. And this brings us to one of the favourite themes of Vivekananda. He is never tired of harping the tune of the unity of philosophy and religion. In the West these two are considered two separate fields of enquiry; religion embraces every individual providing him with an outlet in the form of some practices to his natural but vague urge of the unknown; philosophy is the chosen field of study of a handful of men who make this urge the main current of their life-force. The observation that in India almost everyone considers it his business to think about the unknown and to realise his thought in practice constantly recurs in Vivekananda's lectures. "In India," he says, "an attempt has been made from the earliest times to reach a science of religion and philosophy, for the Hindus do not separate these, as is customary in Western countries. We regard religion and philosophy as but two aspects of one thing which must equally be grounded on reason and scientific truth." The word '*darsana*'—perception—used to denote schools of Hindu philosophy expresses this unity. The respect won by sincere atheism in India is another indication of this unity. Acceptance of the concept of God is the pedestal from which religion is usually supposed to be deriving its validity; denial of God has been looked upon in the West with horror, and 'atheist' was almost the worst derogation in mediaeval West. In India, however, while Buddhism declares an intellectual enquiry into the concept of God irrelevant, the *Sankhya*, one of the great systems of Hindu thought, borders on atheism. Vivekananda shares this breadth of vision and proclaims, "In my life, I have seen a great many spiritual men, a great many sensible persons, who did not believe in God at all, not in our sense of the world." Especially in the context of

2. WVM p. 101.

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modern material civilization, the insistence of Vivekananda rings true, that what is wanted today is not a dictated belief in an imposed God, but an inspired belief in the innate goodness of man. As Christopher Isherwood beautifully expresses, "Vivekananda wants us not to think of ourselves as sinners; such seeming humility can easily degenerate into masochism." But even here Vivekananda is far from imposing his concept of man. We are free to believe that man is a sinner, to continue to function on the self-conscious material plane; this functioning is going to be part of our training. "If we persist in performing acts which strengthen the ego-sense, then we shall find that we are becoming increasingly alienated from knowledge of the *Atman* within us. May be we imagine we want to perform such acts? May be we think we would rather live in ignorance of the *Atman*? Very well, we are at liberty to try it. There will be nobody but ourselves to blame for the delay."[3] All ways seemingly leading away from the unknown are destined ultimately, though after a long-winding trek, to converge in the unknown.

In this domain of spirituality, thought is the currency used. Spiritual knowledge communicates itself through meditating. Belief in spiritual communion of a gross type is inherent in the human mind, and is reflected in such literary masterpieces as 'Hamlet.' Vivekananda believed in a fine communication of ideas without any gross medium as a ghost, and his dealings with Madame Calve and others show that he could effectively and usefully participate in it. The rationale of such communication is incorporated in his writings: "To take an illustration from physical science, when I am doing a certain action, my mind may be said to be in a certain state of vibration; all minds which are in similar circumstances will have the tendency to be affected by my mind." What we ordinarily term will-power actively participates in spiritual communion. Aurobindo sought to employ this power and depended on the process of spiritual communion, when he advised every Indian to think intensely for a certain period of time every day of driving away the British rule. This exchange of ideas seems to take place over large territories and in the most un-expected manner.

3. WVM p. 46.

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Romain Rolland expresses his surprise at finding thought identical with *Vedanta* in the far away West. "And is it not a phenomenon proving the extraordinary immanence of these flashing intuitions dwelling deep within the soul of the West that they re-emerge at the beginning of the nineteenth century with Fichte, who knew nothing of Hindu thought? Whole passages of Fichte and of Sankara can be placed side by side to show their complete identity."[4]

This concept of spiritual communion assumes striking moral import. We cannot think in isolation, our thoughts unmistakably affect, however slowly and imperceptibly, the thoughts of others, and ours in turn are affected by those of others. Therefore, "we run a two-fold danger in doing evil; first, we open ourselves to all the evil influences surrounding us; secondly, we create evil which affects others, may be hundreds of years hence."[5] It must be remembered that this talk of good and evil belongs to the plane of our every day activity conditioned by our sense-organs. In contrast with this plane is the ideological plane of the supreme inexpressible consciousness experienced by the inner being in the highest state of spiritual achievement. On this plane the dual perception of good and evil vanishes, even as our childhood quarrels or disputes in doll play sink into insignificance on our assuming adulthood. This process may be analysed as destruction of evil and consequent adherence to a sort of nascent good and then rising above even this good which cannot now be identified for lack of its counterpart, viz., evil. Vivekananda vehemently calls the bluff of 'social—progress', saying "Objective society will always be a mixture of good and evil..... It is only when the sun is on our head that there is no shadow. When God and good and everything else is in us, there is no evil. In objective life, however, every bullet has its billet..... evil goes with every good as its shadow.....Our very lives depend upon the death of others..... plants or animals.....The other great mistake we often make is that good we take as an ever-increasing item, while evil as a fixed quantity. From this it is argued that evil being diminished every day there will come

4. LVR p. 338. fn.
5. KY p. 86.

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a time when good alone will remain. If good is increasing, so is evil."[6] The infinite good held in store by the 'atom for peace' inextricably burdened by the piles of missiles possessed by the atomic powers is an instance to the point. It should be patent therefore that "'a good world,' 'a happy world', 'Social progress' are all terms equally intelligible with 'hot ice' and 'dark Light'. If it were good it would not be the world.....There is no progress without degression. In one society there is one set of evils, in another another. So with periods of history. In the Middle Ages there were more robbers, now more cheats." Vivekananda here beautifully uses his deep insight into the objective world to crush the cherished illusion about it. Like prophets of yore, he uses natural phenomena to illustrate his point. "In the ocean we cannot raise a wave without causing a hollow somewhere else. The sumtotal of the good things in the world has been the same throughout in its relation to man's need and greed."[7] The physical laws, 'matter is indestructible', and 'the sumtotal of matter remains constant' have thus been here extended to the moral entities of good and evil. This fundamental assertion brings glaringly home the error in gauging the greatness of a Krishna or a Buddha or a Christ, or a Vivekananda with material forceps. These spiritual geniuses represent the summit of human attainment, they command incessant emulation. They have traced the path beginning with evil, progressing through good and at last transcending both in the realm of the unknown. Vivekananda thus does not deny the existence of good and evil, but limits them to the objective world; he calls a spade a spade in fixing them as steps of the ladder, leading to the terrace. He echoes the teaching of every religion when he insists that "Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries; any other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time."[8]

Thus establishing the bona-fides of spiritualism deriving its validity from objective material life, Vivekananda proceeds to state the fundamental principle underlying the nature of the

6. Let. p. 349.
7. WVM p. 132.
8. IHP p. 113.

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universe. This is the striking doctrine of identical arrangement of the microcosm and the macrocosm. Even as the sun reflected in a waterdrop is in a sense identical with the spherical blaze in the sky, the nature of man is, on a miniature scale, identical with that of the universe. This doctrine is as revealing as it is relieving, for, under its benevolent shade, the task of studying universe shrinks apparently to studying oneself. The foregoing pithy remark attributed to Socrates seems valid in the context of this doctrine; but the *Vedantic* assertion of the presence of God in man would restore the validity of the *Brahmin's* remarks.

This theory is a great aid to ascertain the validity of our experiences. When man's urge to dive into the unknown is roused he begins to experiment and record his observations and conclusions, in the same way as he is habituated toi n the outer material world. There is however a big difference; in the case of the external world he can set up an objective laboratory to work in, whereas in his research in the inner world, there cannot be an objective laboratory. The researcher in the microcosm therefore happens to be on slippery ground and uses the support of his experiences in the objective world. Vivekananda himself was a keen student of the microcosm, and his verification of Ramakrishna's powers of mindreading was but a simple instance of his instinct to test the statements in the field of the microcosm with evidence collected in the objective world. The importance of this process cannot be overemphasized; for it is the bypassing of this process that nourishes all kinds of pseudo-spiritualism rife with miracles and breeding legends. The bonafides of spiritualism would only be strengthened by resorting to this process.

On the other hand, laws in the material world must be in conformity with experiences in the mental world. Insofar as they are not their validity would be conditioned. The fundamental laws like matter is indestructible hold good in respect of mental processes also; modern psychology maintains that a desire, a thought, once arisen, does not die out without producing its result. Desires are not completely suppressed, but they lie buried in the subconscious, and leap out in some form at the most unexpected moment. We talk of desires being

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created, but really nothing can be created which did not exist in some form; modern psychology applies this principle of the objective world to the mental world, and has found that it is valid there to a considerable extent. Such rules operating in both the microcosm and the macrocosm are therefore universally valid and can be extended to the spiritual realm. The staunchest materialist has to take into account the working of the mind. Law, the proverbial ass, belies its supposed blindness when it distinguishes between an intentional crime and an accidental crime, and concedes indulgence to the latter. In assessing or discussing results causes have to be taken into consideration, and cause has to be traced to the human mind which again points to the unknown. As Vivekananda says, "The ancients proceeded in their enquiry by taking up mind as the basis; they analysed the mental part of the universe and came to certain conclusions, while modern science is analysing the physical part, and it has come to the same conclusions. Both analyses have led to the same truth."[9]

The other form of the microcosm-macrocosm relationship is closely related to this first form. The contention here is that the microcosm, man, is built on the same plan as the macrocosm, the cosmos. Several instances in the world of science corroborate this proposition. The reproduction of whole bodies, the macrocosms in this limited context, has a parallel in the reproduction of the cells, the minutest unit, the microcosms. The structure of the atom, the smallest unit, is similar to the giant solar system, and the cosmos is an amalgamation of several solar systems. This theory does not limit itself to matter; it maintains that just as an individual has his intelligence and his mind, there is the universal mind, the cosmic intelligence. It is from this cosmic intelligence that we draw our individual intelligences. This contention is based on two observations, among others. Firstly, a child is endowed with intelligence; where does it come from? A part of it may be explained by heredity; but its intelligence is never the same as its parents', the remaining part must have some source, and that is the cosmic intelligence. The second observation is that in the

9. SPR p. 25.

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history of the world there are often huge trends in certain directions which cannot be prevented by individuals, in fact, which uproot before our eyes the strongest individuals and groups thereof. Sometimes these trends cause unprecedented progress, and even there one cannot account for them fully. During such strong waves individuals often stop functioning intellectually and seem to work merely as tools in the hands of destiny. The industrial revolution, the birth of democracy, respect for the human rights, the world wars, cosmic havocs are some of such trends. These colossal drifts which overwhelm whole peoples and which we call destiny may be described as manifestations of the cosmic will.

Further in nature certain changes are going on before your eyes which you see and understand, but there are other changes so much finer that no human perception can catch them. Atomic rediation, the penetration of germs, movements in the oceans are grosser examples of these latter cosmic processes. Just as, therefore, three layers of intelligence in the individual, viz, the conscious, the subconscious and the superconscious, are recognized, three similar layers in the cosmic intelligence seem to be at work. Several operations at work in the cosmos begin in the superconscious cosmic intelligence, at this stage completely beyond the pale of the individual conscious intelligence. Then they enter the range of the cosmic subconscious intelligence when they are dimly perceived by the human conscious intelligence. In the third and the grossest state they shoot into the range of the cosmic conscious intelligence when they can be perceived by the human conscious intelligence which feels like Keats first looking into Chapman's Homer, 'like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken.' Although, however, the operations in the cosmic superconscious and subconscious intelligences are beyond the pale of the human conscious intelligence, they are within the range of their counterparts of the human intelligence, viz., respectively the human superconscious and subconscious intelligences. Revelations of scientific truths like gravity and relativity generally represent moments of contact between the subconscious intelligences of the microcosm and the macrocosm; a falling fruit is everybody's observation, but the process it represents

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was grasped by the subconscious intelligence of Newton. The Zero in the subconscious intelligence of the macrocosm shot at a revealing moment into the subconscious intelligence of the great anonymous Hindu mathematician, and, trickling down in the conscious intelligence, revolutionised mathematics.

A classification of the intelligence according to its functions has also been made. "The subconscious state is what we find in animals, and call instinct. This is nearly infallible, but very limited. Instinct almost never fails. An animal instinctively knows a poisonous herb from an edible one, but its instinct is limited to one or two things, it works like a machine. Then comes the higher state of knowledge, which is fallible, makes mistakes often, but has a larger scope, although it is slow, and this you call reason. It is much larger than instinct, but there are more dangers of mistakes in reasoning than in instinct. There is a still higher state of the mind, the superconscious, which belongs only to the Yogis, men who have cultivated it. This is as infallible as instinct and still more unlimited than reason. It is the highest state."[10]

The problems of creation and termination of this universe have engaged the human mind since the dawn of civilization. Whatever is must have begun and whatever has a beginning must have an end. This reasoning makes it imperative to explain the processes of beginning and end of the cycles of creation. As a *Vedantist* Vivekananda believes creation to be beginning-less and endless; but the various cycles of the emergence of the cosmos and its merging away have to be explained. He calls these processes evolution and involution. "The stage of going back to the balance, to the perfect equilibrium, is called the end of a cycle. The evolution and the involution have been compared by theistic writers in India to the out-breathing and inbreathing of god. God, as it were, breathes out the universe, and it returns into Him again. When it quiets down, what becomes of the universe? It still exists, only in finer form.....This return to an undifferentiated condition constitutes involution. Involution and evolution are eternally going on, so that when we speak of

10. SPR. p. 29.

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a beginning we refer to the beginning of a cycle."[11] The relation between cause and result is that cause is the finer state of the material of which result is the less fine state. "Cause is the more subtle state of the manifested state, the unmanifested state of that which becomes manifested." Destruction is reverting to the cause, and creation is proceeding from the cause.

The question then arises: how does undifferentiated condition, the *prakriti* of Hindu philosophers, become differentiated? Everything in nature is insentient, though possessed of some sort of consciousness, except something which constitutes all initiative. Only life can have initiative; when it passes away, the body, which functioned while in its contact, stops functioning. This initiative is life, it is not like any other energy like heat and electricity, for these energies have no initiating capacity; life causes initiative. It is neither will nor intelligence nor anything that can be comprehended through the intelligence for it is the source of the intelligence and the will. This life is called '*Purusha*' by Hindu philosophers. Had the *Purusha* been the will, one could stop the functioning of the heart at will, but one cannot: the heart and the brain and the body continue to function as long as the *Purusha* is present with them, and stop when it is not. This *Purusha* is something like the catalytic agent in a chemical reaction, which promotes the reaction without participating in it. It is like the sun which causes the sunflower to bloom without coming in its contact. These analogies are good only so far as they go, they form part of the known, while the initiator is unknown. If it is known, another something which knows it would have to be supposed, and so *ad infinitum*. The *Sankhya* school of philosophy believes that every animate unit in this universe has its *Purusha*, and death means this *Purusha's* leaving the body. They also believe that there are innumerable *Purushas* in the universe.

Thus the stronger the inner capacity of man the wider would his knowledge be. The potential capacity of man is unlimited. "Who could understand the great potentiality of the savages of Britain dressed in skins at their religious worship burning men alive to appease their Gods?"[12] Vivekananda defined life as

11. *SPR. p. 11.*
12. *EVL p. 95.*

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"The tendency of the unfolding and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down." Life is a struggle, and a real fighter bubbles with joy if the opponent is stubborn. Even objective sciences penetrate through the gross to the fine: the huge pedestal of geometry for example goes back to the point which cannot be perceived. No wonder then that the infinite urge to know the unknown points to the imperceptible. The unknown would become known only by identifying oneself with the knower. This life is yet another chance come our way to continue the effort and attain this realisation; let it be the last chance. Through endless eternity emerges the hand of the unknown. Shake hands once and you have won for all.

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21

ADVAITA AS EXPOUNDED BY VIVEKANANDA

THE MAGNITUDE of the unknown can only be imagined. The more man knows, the more he knows the limitations of his knowledge. Man's capacity for knowledge is apparently very limited, and he has to depend miserably on the five sense organs for elementary knowledge. The taste of potassium cyanide, the deadly poison, is said to be sweet, and thereby hangs the tale of how five scientists had to pay with their lives in order that the rest of the world should know it; the first taster could write an 'S', the second a 'W' and so on. However stupendous may the progress of science be, the organ for learning about the taste of an object continues to be the indispensable tongue! And even this knowledge is not 'pure', insists the *Vedantist*.

Vivekananda accepts the psychology of the *Sankhyas* who, as their name indicates, set out enumerating the elements of the universe, and concluded that there are two elements, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the Sentient and the Insentient, the Live and Non-live parts of the universe. He pays a warm tribute to *Kapila*, the propagator of the *Sankhya* theory. He expounds how, as the *Sankhyas* say, every bit of knowledge is a compound, that *is*, a mixed entity. When I say I know a blackboard, what I really know is the reaction of my mind to the socalled black-board. "The blackboard itself is unknown, I can never know

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it. It is what the German philosophers call the 'thing-in-itself'. The blackboard, that 'X' is acting on my mind and the mind reacts. The mind is like a lake. If you throw a stone upon a lake as soon as the stone strikes it, a reactionary wave comes towards the stone. This wave is what you really see. And this wave is not like the stone at all . . . 'X' plus mind is our external universe. All knowledge is by reaction. When that Knowledge Absolute becomes limited we call it intuition, when it becomes still more limited we call it reason, instinct, etc. This Knowledge Absolute may be imagined to have two counterparts, Existence Absolute and Bliss Absolute. These three are but three names given to the same entity to cover the three fundamental urges of man, to exist, to think, to feel. Bliss Absolute, when it becomes limited, we call love, attraction for bodies or for ideas. Existence Absolute becomes limited and manifests as plant life, animal life, human life just as infinite space is apparently limited by the walls of a room.

This one reigning in whatever is *Brahman*; appearing behind the universe. He is called God; appearing in the microcosm, the soul. "The universe is you yourself, the undivided you; you are throughout this universe . . . The whole universe is you; this universe is your body; you are the universe, both formed and unformed. You are the soul of the universe, its body also. You are God, you are the angels, you are man, you are the animals, the plants, the minerals, you are everything, all manifestation is you."[1]

This daring concept has been the subject of discussion the world over, and Vivekananda's exposition of it, drawing liberally on science, was as fresh as ever; it gave rise to new waves of thoughts in the West. The way in which this knowledge dawns on one seems to remain a closed book. We find Romain Rolland guessing in amazement—"I am far from denying to Indian thinkers a capacity for intellectual concentration in the Absolute; but even the formless of the *Advaita Vedanta* is embraced to a certain extent by their burning intuition. Even if the Formless is without attributes, and beyond vision, is it so certain that it is beyond some form of mysterious touch ? Is not revelation

1. '*Tat Tvam asi*'; 'Thou art that'. *Chhandogya Upanishad*.

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itself a kind of terrible contact?"[2] Only those who have known revelation are competent to answer this question. Vivekananda himself conceded the greatest variety in such matters; One should accept what one perceives and proceed on that basis. Different persons may call the same thing by different names. One may experience revelation as a terrible contact; another may see a terrible sight. Rolland himself accounts for this state of affairs in the domain of *Advaita Vedanta*; "The true *Vedantic* spirit does not start out with a system of preconceived ideas. It possesses absolute liberty and unrivalled courage among religions with regard to the facts to be observed and the diverse hypotheses it has laid down for their realisation."[3] Vivekananda thought it wrong to base knowledge on the blind will, thinking preceded willing in his opinion. In his discussion with Paul Deussen at Kiel, he is recorded to have "pointed out where Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann were wrong in founding their philosophy upon the blind will, the Unconscious, as contrasted with Universal Thought, which must precede all desiring or willing".[4] This insistence on thought is one of the causes of the breadth of vision and spirit of accommodation displayed by Vivekananda and thinkers like him.

The underlying unity of existence is the main motive of human activity. Man is inevitably and constantly moving towards *Advaita*, knowingly or unknowingly. Modern Scientific progress unmistakably demonstrates this, and Vivekananda profusely tapped science to water the plant of *Advaita*. "All things sentient and insentient, are rushing helter—skelter towards unity," he told Haripada Mitra in 1892, "In the beginning, men gave different names to the diverse things on which their eyes fell, then, after examination, they arrived at the conclusion that all things are derived from sixtythree primary elements . . . When chemistry will reach its goal, all things will be discovered as emerging out of unity, of which they are but so many states. At first people considered heat, light and electricity to be different. Now it has been proved that they are different states of the energy . . . In early days men divided the things of this

2. LRR 47. fn.
3. LVR p. 206.
4. Rem. p. 301.

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world into the sentient, the insentient and the plants. Then they discovered that . . . Plants also have life and feeling . . . So We are now left with only two divisions . . . the sentient and the insentient. A day will soon come when it will be found that even that which is considered insentient has some sort of sentience . . . The undulated land that we see on the surface of the earth is also trying to become plane . . . A hot thing placed amid other things tries to attain the same state of warmth through radiation of heat. Rain water is washing down the hills to fill up the valleys. Things are thus advancing towards unity through conduction, radiation and convection." He also told how the research in religion differs from that in science. Science studies things individually; religion asks, "What is that by knowing which everything will be known ?"

Whatever we see is subject to change. The greatest and apparently unmoving mountains undergo changes. Creation takes place anew every instant. It is ceaseless action and the will to strive, the outpouring of a spring, never a stagnant pond. Where there is a lump of earth today, tomorrow there will be a pond. A heart seething with anger today may be seen bubbling with love at a future moment. In turn every entity in the universe partakes of the essence of every other entity. Attributes and objects which are interchangeable must be essentially the same. This appearing multiplicity therefore is only the outward form of an abiding unity which is unchangeable.

The unlimited nature of the one is discussed by Vivekananda by taking simple illustrations. Everything which we know in this universe is limited; and whatever limits something else must itself be limited by something. If we think of space we have to think of it as a little circle, we cannot imagine a limited space without contrasting it with unlimited space. The finite can be perceived only on the background of the infinite; and this infinite provides the contrast to everything finite. This infinite is the self or *Brahman*. Such infinite there can be only one. Suppose there are two infinites, A and B; the infinite A limits the infinite B, because B is not A, and A is not B. So either A can be infinite or B can be infinite, but not both in any case. Thus the infinite *Brahman* can be only one.

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The problem of creation is one of the trickiest that have exercised the intellect of the philosophers. The *Sankhyas* pronounce *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the final insentient and sentient entities, as the two ultimate ones. But these two entities would have to be infinite, for otherwise they would not be final. And there cannot be two infinites; there can be only one. Further, the insentient *Prakriti* would need a sentient agency for prompting, for making it work. "This sentient being which is behind the whole universe is what we call God, and consequently this universe is not different from him. It is He Himself who has become the universe. He is not only the instrumental cause of the universe, but also the material cause. Cause is never different from effect, the effect is but the cause reproduced in another form. We see that every day . . . The second step in *Vedanta* is that these souls are also a part of God, One spark each of that Infinite Fire." As from a mass of fire millions of small particles fly, even so from this Ancient One have come all these souls. (*Mundakopanishad, II, 1.*) . . . What is meant by a part of the Infinite ? The Infinite is indivisible; there cannot be parts of the Infinite. "The *Advaitist*, the Non-Dualist, solves the problem by maintaining that there is really no part, that each soul is really not a part of the Infinite, but actually is the Infinite. The sun reflected from millions of globules of water appears to be millions of suns; so all these souls are but reflections and not the real form . . . There is but one Infinite Being in the universe, and that being appears as 'You' and as 'I' but this appearance of division is after all delusion . . . This apparent division is caused by looking at him through the network of time, space and causation. When I look at God through this network I see Him as the material world. When I look at him from a little higher plane, yet through the same network, I see Him as an animal; a little higher as a man, a little higher as a God; but yet He is the one Infinite Being of the universe, and the Being we are. I am that, you are that, not parts of it, but the whole of it."

Thus is born the theory of *Maya*, the Divine Illusion. This theory is the *Advaitist's* solution of the problem of creation. Different versions of *Maya* have been propounded through the texts of *Vedanta.* The versions accepted and preached by

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Vivekananda is the dynamic one which brings out possibly the greatest merit of *Advaita*, its tremendous incentive to the moral good of the world. The tragedy of philosophy lies in the fact that it has to take recourse to words and try to express what is really inexpressible. Words gain different connotations, and philosophy has often to depend on the whim of words. The word 'illusion' is one such eccentric word. It leads the concept of *Maya* into two interpretations exactly opposite of each other. One interpretation says that as this world is an illusion, let us turn our backs to it, and have no truck with it. To dislike the world, to be indifferent with it, and to hate it, to hate such social institutions as marriage, commerce, which foster attachment with the world, are the promptings this interpretation gives currency to. This interpretation seems a sordid one. This gloomy, dismal view of life seems to be disappointing. Are we all toiling our bones and flesh away to be sardonically told that all this is foolish ? Are noble instincts like self-less service to humanity only an illusion to be thrown away ?

The second dynamic, powerful interpretation of *Maya* works like a tonic to all peevishness, slumber. It says that this world, though unreal, is not purposeless. A reflection in a mirror is not the real man, but it serves a purpose, and a great one—that of checking up the man's personality. It has its own important place in the man's life. This world is also a reflection of the Infinite. How can the knower know himself ? The shortest cut would be to see a reflection. You cannot see your own face except in a mirror, and so the self cannot see its own nature until it is reflected, and this whole universe is the self trying to realise itself. This reflection is thrown back first from the protoplasm, then from plants and animals, and so on and on from better reflectors; until the best reflector—the perfect man—is reached. Just as a man wanting to see his face looks first in a little pool of muddy water, and sees just an outline. Then he comes to clearer water, and sees a better image, then a piece of shining metal, and sees a still better image, and at last to a looking—glass, and sees himself reflected as he is. Therefore the perfect man is the highest reflection of that Being, who is both

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subject and object."[5] A man, confident of his personality and his ever—ready countenance, need not look into a mirror, similarly the perfect man does not need any ideal to be emulated. He has realised his identity with the Infinite, and serves as a live ideal worthy of emulation. His interests coincide with those of humanity. Not the body, not the family, not the country—contain his radiance, nothing short of the whole world is his beat. The concept of *Maya* thus culminates in the grand conception of the universal man. And here the human instinct unerringly echoes the teachings of *Advaita*. In an inspiring passage noted for its eloquence and fervour Vivekananda says, "You now find why man instinctively worshipped everything, and how perfect men are worshipped as God in every country. You may talk as you like, but it is they who are bound to be worshipped. That is why men worship incarnations, such as Christ or Buddha. They are the most perfect manifestations of the eternal self . . . A perfect man is much higher than any conception of God you or I can make. In him the circle becomes complete; the subject and the object become one."[6]

Why is it then the illusion persists ? Why does the perfect man become imperfect ? the *Advaitist* parries this question, for it is an impossible one. An illusion cannot persist; it is unreal, realise that it is unreal. The perfect man does not become imperfect; you are perfect, realise that. Clouds pass momentarily before the eternal blue sky and lend it their colour; but the sky is eternally blue, no mistake about that.

Maya being divine is not to be looked down upon, it is the great instrument for the fallen to rise, and realise the identity with the Infinite. Romain Rolland has given a beautiful psychological import to this divine concept of *Maya*. "To Ramakrishna" he says, "*Maya* itself was God, for everything was God. It too was one face of *Brahman*. Moreover when he had reached the summit after the stormy ascent, Ramakrishna forgot nothing of the anguish, the transports, the accidents of the climb."[7] Nothing succeeds like success. The toil of the journey is transformed into pleasure once the destination is

5. SPR p. 59.
6. SPR p. 60.
7. LRR p. 63.

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reached. In the sacred atmosphere of identity with the Infinite even thorns assume flowerhood.

Maya has also been described as the divine power of the great God. The material world has its own rules, we need food for the body and a hot object burns our skin. Even if these phenomena belong to the level of reflection, they have their validity in their own field. This validity is received from the divine power, *Maya*. You cannot alter the rules of the working of the universe, because they have the sanction of the Lord. In a game of children you participate with pretended zeal and snub the thief who does not address the judge courteously, nay, you become the thief to show the children how to undergo punishment with repentance and fortitude. You have made the rules of the game for the boys, but once they are made even you do not break them in order to set a worthy example. You look upon the game as the training ground for the boys to learn their lessons leading to a successful life. Similarly, this material world is the school in which we are admitting ourselves in order to emerge unattached and free. We cannot break the laws of this *Maya*, we have to rise above them. As Ramakrishna used to say, the difference between a perfect man and an imperfect one is that the former reciprocates the divine call while the latter does not. "God is in all men but all men are not in God, that is the reason why they suffer." Assuming the full status of God that we are is the key to perfection. When consummation is reached there is no more limited life for us, we assert our infinity.

The synthesis achieved and preached by Vivekananda of the various schools of *Vedanta* is really marvellous. It is common knowledge that the *Upanishads* contain passages propagating all sorts of opinions on relations of God with man and with the universe. These opinions are often contradictory to each other. Each of the main systems of *Vedanta*, viz., *Visishtadvaita* (Qualified Non-Dualism), *Dvaita* (Dualism) and *Advaita* (Non-Dualism) derives its authority mainly from the *Upanishads* and perhaps would have liked the *Upanishads* to preach its standpoint to the exclusion of the others. But that is not the case. The *Upanishads* propagate all the three viewpoints in

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different places and contexts, and it is a hard job for each of these schools to account for the presence of the other views in the *Upanishads*. Vivekananda studied the *Upanishads* independently and came to the conclusion that the apparent contradictions in the *Upanishads* pointed to one underlying system making them a harmonious whole. He labelled this thought a discovery. He writes in 1895 to the organisers of '*Brahmavadin*', a magazine proposed to be started in Madras, "Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the *Vedanta*, that is, in the three stages of the *Vedanta* Philosophy, *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita* and *Advaita*; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Every one is necessary. This is the essential of religion. The *Vedanta* applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India is Hinduism. The first stage, *Dvaita*, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism; the *Advaita* as applied in its *Yoga* perception form is Buddhism. Now, by religion is meant the *Vedanta*; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings and other circumstances of different nations. You will find that the philosophy is the same, the *Saktas*, *Saivas* and others apply it, each to their own special cult and forms."[8]

The *Advaita* as propounded by Vivekananda was therefore marked by a wonderful spirit of acceptance of diversity. However strange, however unmanageable and irreconcilable may diverse thoughts seem, there is always a most appealing and real undercurrent of unity. Sometimes the apparently radically opposite thought-currents find friends in each other, even as the opposite poles attract each other. Ideas seemingly farthest from each other have hidden similarities; the north and south poles are after all the two ends of the same axis. The spirit of co-existence could not be more exquisite than that practised by Vivekananda. It was a living and logical outcome of his realisation of the basic and infinite unity of creation. Having experienced the unity, who cares for the outward diversity? Not only this, diversity is a necessary adjunct of unity; not all men

8. LEW p. 345.

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are meant to traverse the same path. Religious tolerance? No, acceptance of all religions! "I do not come to convert you to a new belief; I want to make a Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; a Unitarian a better Unitarian. I want to teach you to live the truth, to reveal the light within your own soul." The merit of this message was that it was just true. It should not have come as a surprise, but it came as an inspiring surprise. It is one of the subtle ironies of *Maya*, of human existence, that the naked truth surprises by its very breadth. This message however owed its radiance as much to its content as to the transparent spiritual authority of its speaker. Mrs. Wilcox, the poetess, said of it, "He gave the message that strengthened the man of business, that caused the frivolous society woman to pause and think; that gave the artist new aspirations; that imbued the wife and mother, the husband and father, with a larger and holier comprehension of duty."[9]

The two parts of the dictum 'unity in diversity' are equally important. The basic unity of all existence is as significant as the apparent diversity through which it manifests itself. The body is as much God as the soul. With a penetrating insight for balance, Vivekananda generated a burning passion for work and developing one's individuality with a quiet resignation into the Infinite Lord. On occasions when men seemed to be drifting away from the awareness of the all-pervading God, he was quick to remind them. When, for instance, he was asked to comment on the Immaculate conception of Jesus, he remarked that there had been many in India who had claimed that. In continuation, to the question, 'Is not such a theory opposed to the law of nature?', he calmly replied, 'What is nature to the Lord? It is all His play. We are slaves of nature. The Lord is the Master of nature. He can do as he pleases. He can take one or a dozen bodies at a time, if He chooses, and in any way He chooses. How can we limit Him?' Vivekananda's reaction to circumstances was thus always inspired by his deep-rooted realisation of *Advaita*; God's immanence had become his lifebreath.

During his career in the West, Vivekananda had to combat several objections to *Advaita*, the commonest of them being that

9. LEW p. 387.

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in *Advaita* man's individuality would be lost. In the questions which usually followed a talk on *Advaita*. there was almost sure to be the question, "But Swami, what will become of our individuality, when one realises one's oneness with God?" He would laugh away this question, and playfully ridicule it. He would say, "You people in this country (U.S.) are so afraid of losing your in-di-vi-du-al-i-ties," drawing out the word in laughing mockery, "why, you are not individuals yet. When you know God you will be. When you realise your own nature, you will attain your true individualities, not before. In knowing God you cannot lose anything worth having."[10] Perhaps the most exquisitely tender answer was given to this question when it came from the tortured soul of Madame E. Calve. She relates, " 'I cannot bear the idea!' I exclaimed. 'I cling to my individuality, unimportant as it may be! I don't want to be absorbed into an eternal unity. The mere thought is terrible to me.' 'One day a drop of water fell into the vast ocean,' the Swami answered, 'when it found itself there, it began to weep and complain just as you are doing'. The great ocean laughed at the drop of water. 'Why do you weep?' it asked. 'I do not understand. When you join me, you join all your brothers and sisters, the other drops of water of which I am made. You become the ocean itself. If you wish to leave me, you have only to rise up on a sunbeam into the clouds. From these you can descend again, a little drop of water, a blessing and a benediction to the thirsty earth!"[11] If one wanted *Advaita* in a nutshell, this parable could not be bettered. Individuality tended to make one selfish, narrow-minded, whereas the motto of *Advaita* was 'not me, but thou;' these words do not spell suicide, but the conquest of a vast empire.

The concept of a personal God like Krishna and Siva and Kali was repugnant to the Western mind. The rationalist shuddered at the apparent contradiction involved in propounding *Advaita* on one hand and worshipping a family God like Vishnu with all format. Really there is nothing more surprising in worshipping an image of God than in accepting a piece of paper

10. LEW p. 677.
11. Rem. p. 267.

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as money. It is symbolism, pure and simple, and symbols run this world of *Maya*. The thorn of *maya* has to be extracted by means of another thorn of a personal God, and then both are to be thrown away. Explaining this symbolism, Vivekananda said, "The totality of all souls—not the human alone is the personal God. The will of the totality nothing can resist. It is what we know as Law. And that is what we mean by Siva, Kali and so on."

On the other hand, there were thinkers who were just waiting for Vivekananda to sound the great clarion call of *Advaita*; they found it but an echo of the bell ringing in their hearts since long. This psychological predisposition made them instinctive followers of *Advaita*. Christopher Isherwood says, "*Vedanta* (*Advaita*) is non-dualistic. Psychologically, this was of the greatest importance to me, because of my fear and hatred of God as the father-figure. I don't think I could ever have swallowed a philosophy that began with dualism."[12] Sister Nivedita's reaction was even more characteristic. "To not a few of us, the words of Swami Vivekananda came as living water to men perishing of thirst. Many of us have been conscious for years past of that growing uncertainty and despair, with regard to Religion, which has beset the intellectual life of Europe for half a century. Belief in the dogmas of Christianity had become impossible to us, and we had no tool, such as we now hold, by which to cut away the doctrinal shell to the kernel of Reality, in our faith. To these, the *Vedanta* has given intellectual confirmation and philosophical expression of their own mistrusted intuitions . . . . . It was the Swami's 'I am God' that came as something always known, only never said before... . . . . .Yet again, it was the unity of Man, that was the touch needed to rationalise all previous experiences and give logical sanction to the thirst for absolute service never boldly avowed in the past."[13] Echoes of *Advaita* are found in the West, notably in German and Greek philosophy. Romain Rolland remarks that 'the metaphysics of the *Advaitic* Absolute are akin to the doctrines of Pre-Socratian Greeks, to the doctrine of One

12. WVM p. 43.
13. LEW p. 440.

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without second of Xenophanes, and the Eleates, who exclude all movement, all change, all future, all multiplicity as nothting but Illusion."[14]

Vivekananda has thus carved a place for himself as the modern apostle of *Advaita*, of cosmic unity. His words have become the modern hymn of *Advaita*: "I see God in all that exists. I see Him as completely in the least fragment as in the whole cosmos . . . . .The very greatest of men is only a clearer reflection of the sun which gleams in each drop of dew."

14. LVR p. 70. fn.

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22

MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALISM

VIVEKANANDA's contact with the West throbbing with active materialism brought him face to face with a way of life which he could not help admiring. The robust *Karma-yogi* found the flood of energy in the West most encouraging. Passing a general remark that "the vast majority of men are atheists" he continued to say, "I am glad that in modern times another set of atheists has come up in the Western world, the materialists, because they are sincere atheists." This tribute to modern materialism was paid when it was in its prime, when its promise of bringing infinite prosperity was yet too fresh to be assessed dispassionately. Views attributing poverty and misery to lack of enough production and means, and predicting plenty as a sure sequel to technological advance were in the air. Later in the forties the bluff was called, the *i's* were dotted and the *t's* scored with blood, and today, in spite of man-made satellites hovering in the atmosphere, the world seems to be labouring under the curse of science, the future seems bleaker than it ever was. The import of the phrase 'sincere atheists' is not however obsolete; in 1900 the emphasis possibly was on 'sincere'; today the accent has to be shifted to 'atheists.'

The modern materialism discarding or bypassing the quest for the Infinite does unwittingly what it does not profess to do. Probe the earth and you will find Heaven; Penetrate into matter

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and spirit will emerge. This theory brings out the merit of materialism which is expressed by Aurobindo in the following words. "The supra-physical can only be really mastered in its fullness, when we can keep our feet firmly on the physical. 'Earth is His footing', says the *Upanishad*, whenever it images the self that is manifested in the universe. And it is certainly the fact that the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes our foundation for the higher knowledge, even for the highest."[1]

Thus the dismal quandary in which science has now landed us does not take away from the inevitability and benefits of material quests. Despite the misdirected use of science bringing the world to the threshold of destruction, the probe into the physical world will and must continue, only it should be chained to a basic spiritual attitude. The need for material progress in India cannot be over-stressed. Vivekananda keenly felt this need and called for unstinted efforts to mitigate the poverty of Indian masses* and to improve their material condition. We shall discuss his relentless efforts in this direction in Section 6. Here we are exploring the philosophical basis of his synthesis of materialism and spiritualism. Vivekananda stands by and upholds the four-fold goal of human life, comprising *Dharma* (Righteous conduct), *Artha* (Earning money,) *Kama* (propagating the species) and *Moksha* (Salvation or freedom from the worldly ties). *Artha* symbolises material prosperity, and the duty of cultivating *artha* lies on the shoulders of the householder (*Grihastha*) who is one of the four pillars of society, the other three being the student (*Brahmacharin*), the resigned (*Vanaprastha*) and the retired (*Sannyasin*). "A householder who does not struggle to get wealth is immoral. If he is lazy and content to lead an idle life, he is immoral, because upon him depend hundreds." On the family plane, therefore, Vivekananda advocates the pursuit of material prosperity for that is the necessary pre-condtion of the inner solitude to be earned in the last two stages of life. He did not mince words while denouncing the hypocritical argument glorifying the spiritual past of India and neglecting the poor present, sometimes even justifying it.

*India contains the largest number of the Asian poor.--Report on 28.4.89.

1. LVR p. 249.

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Such men at heart crave for comforts but denounce them because the grapes are sour. "Even taking all that foolishness for granted, in all India there are, say, a hundred thousand really spiritual men and women; now for the spiritualisation of these, must three hundred millions be sunk in savegery and starvation?"[2] Privileges earned by social, economic or intellectual status should not lead to disproportionate material gains until the humblest man has enough money to fulfil his minimum needs. This policy is not the monopoly of this ism or that; nothing would be further from propriety than claiming it the exclusive plank and prattle of communism. Vivekananda was confronted in Europe witn socialism in all its nicety; he met and conferred with Peter Kropotkin, the socialist leader, at the Paris International Exhibition in 1900. The socialist movement which later culminated in the Russian Communism was then just toddling. In that era Vivekananda declared, "I am a socialist." Equality in material prosperity and rise in material wealth were the twin needs of Indian economic life then as now, and Vivekananda's assertion reminds everybody that no spiritual upheaval could be projected successfully without chaining it to this material aim. He declares in a letter, "I do not believe in a God who will give me enternal bliss in heaven and cannot give me bread here."

The insistence of Vivekananda is on basing affluence on spiritualism, that is, on love and sacrifice and not on hatred and greed. Really speaking, deeply bathed in spiritualism as he was, Vivekananda looked upon comfortable living only as a means to spiritual progress. He neither looked upon material pleasures as an end in themselves nor even considered it possible to eradicate pain. Pleasure and pain are confined to the phycical sphere only in the elementary stage; when the physical causes of pain are uprooted, plasure and pain shift their venue to the heart and the mind; on this plane honour soothes man's mind, and insult or even neglect makes it sad. The ceaseless efforts of man for material happiness therefore result only in shifting the field of sensitivity; if man is constantly happy, that unerring constancy bores him and makes him sad. Vivekananda knew this,

2. KY p. 313.

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and therefore, while welcoming a new economic system he remarked, "A redistribution of pain and pleasure is always better than always the same persons having pains and pleasures. The sum total of good and evil in the world remains ever the same. The yoke will be lifted from shoulder to shoulder by new systems, that is all."

The contrast he found between the economic feverishness in the West and the appalling sluggishness in India has even today not become out of date. He elaborated it, dissected it and wanted to supply the deficiency in both. He holds diet partly responsible for the two diverse tendencies, and quotes medical authority for his interesting observation: "We are vegetarians—most of our diseases are of the stomach; our old men and women generally die of stomach complaints. They of the West take meat—most of their diseases are of the heart; their old men and women generally die of heart or lung diseases. A learned doctor of the West observes that the people who have chronic stomach complaints generally tend to a melancholy and renouncing nature, and the people suffering from complaints of the heart and the upper parts of the body have always hope and faith to the last; the cholera patient is from the very beginning afraid of death, while the comsumptive patient hopes to the last moment that he will recover. Is it owing to this, my doctor friend with good reasoning asks, that 'the Indians always talk and think of death and renunciation?' He continues with the confession, 'As yet, I have not been able to find a satisfactory answer to this; but the question seems to have an air of truth about it, and demands serious consideration.'"[3]

That attitudes to life owe themselves partly to geographical circumstances obtaining in India and the West is common knowledge. Vivekananda points out that the Asian civilization has mostly evolved itself around rivers and fertile plains; the Ganga, the Yangtse and the Euphrates nourished the ancient Hindu, Chinese and Iranian civilizations. The original foundation of all these civilizations is therefore agriculture. The land of birth of the European civilization is full of hills and is near the seacoast; therefore piracy and robbery were their ancient

3. EW p. 33.

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trades. Due to these circumstances, of course, these civilizations are far removed from each other. Today they are undergoing two experiments, both incomplete and complementary. "In India we have social communism, with the light of *Advaita*, that is, spiritual individualism, playing on and around it; in Europe you are social individualists, but your thought is dualistic which is spiritual communism. Thus the one consists of socialist institutions, hedged in by individualist thought, while the other is made up of individualist institutions within the hedge of communistic thought." The insistence in India has been more an private morals and cleanliness and that in the West on public morals. This analysis seems, by and large, true today, and the prescription of Vivekananda is also valid in the present circumstances: borrowing material civilization from the West, and lending a little spiritualisation to the West, this latter too for our benefit primarily, for we are suffering from spiritual corpulence, as it were; our tongues was eloquent on spiritual ideals which we connot realise due to lack of material strength.

The scourge of rank naked materialism results in one damaging effect on character, it makes man showy. The fast changing fashions in the West, the display of the human body, the concentration on the outside, the boost given by modern materialism to advertisement came in for Vivekananda's unreserved condemnation. Unabashed hypocrisy is the bitter curse of naked materialism, and freeing oneself from its clutches is the first step in realising one's real nature. "Nine tenths of our life's energy" remarked Vivekananda, "is spent in trying to make people think us that which we are not; that energy would be more rightly spent in becoming that which we would like to be." When in such a mood, the glory of India's spiritual past would swim in his eyes. In this mood, he would burst out, "Did you ever hear of a country, where the greatest kings tried to trace their descent, not to kings, not to robber-barons living in old castles, who plundered poor travellers, but to semi-naked sages who lived in the forest ?" Here was the same spiritual fountain re-springing in the form of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and other moderen spiritual savants of India. As a spokesman of these light-shedding luminaries Vivekananda proclaims to the

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world: "Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the heart of millions in other lands."[4] Once materialism colours the eyes and worldly profit and loss become the only measuring rods, once the idea that everything has its price sweeps the mind of man, he comprehends everything with a grain of prejudice, and the higher values of life become to him a closed book. Vivekananda illustrated this from the *Indra-Virochana* episode in the *Vedas* : Both were taught divinity, but *Virochana* took it to mean the body, and *Indra*, the soul; *Virochana* earned only temporary benefits, while Indra qualified for eternal bliss.

The argument that if with all its high *Vedanta*, India could not prosper materially, of what use it was, was nulled by Vivekananda with an unexpected counter-argument. The argument was constantly in the forefront in missionary propaganda in India, and its refutation by Vivekananda must be read in that context. He writes in a letter, "On metaphysical lines, no nation can hold a candle to the Hindus; and curiously all the fellows that come over here from Christian land have that one antiquated foolishness of an argument that because the Christians are powerful and rich and the Hindus are not so, Christianity must be better than Hinduism. To which the Hindus very aptly retort that, that is the very reason why Hinduism is a religions Christianity is not."[5] Success in worldly affairs is a sure sign of the predominance of materialism though its absence is no indication of the predominance of spirituality. On the other hand, no religion worth the name would oppose material prosperity, though every religion denounces rank materialism. No genuine religious preacher would therefore hold material prosperity as a bait to net recruits in his religious group. Vivekananda's profound sorrow at such mercenary religion carried on by the so—called followers of Christ burst out in vehement denouncement of "those who would make Christ turn his head to disown them." Vivekananda shared with other thinkers of the nineteenth century a spontaneous faith in the inherent spirituality of India. Several social customs like giving alms to the needy, looking

4. *IHP p. 6.*
5. *Let. p. 394.*

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out before sitting to a meal for a hungry person to share food with him, etc. were traced by him to the inner calm enthused by deep-seated spiritualism. Incidents which tended to shock this faith were terrible blows on his sensitive patriotic mind. When a visitor in Madras expressed his doubt about this latant spirituality in India of which Vivekananda often talked, he said, "If like me you had visited the slums of Europe and America and seen how near to brutes the inhabitants of those slums are, and then compared them with our masses in India, your doubts as to the effect of Hindu religious belief on the masses would have vanished."

Vivekananda was equally aware of the silly length to which some so-called orthodox Hindus carried their religious fervour. Some people endlessly argued that every modern invention had its precursor in the *Vedas* or the Sanskrit epics or the *Puranas*. The eloquence of some others was called forth by the slightest criticism of an out-of-date injunction. Vivekananda lables these pseudo-spiritualists 'monomaniacs' and asks the nation to beware of them. "This monomaniac has philosophical and metaphysical, and Lord knows what other puerile explanations for every superstition that belongs to his peculiar race, or his peculiar gods, or his peculiar village. Every little village superstition is to him a mandate of the *Vedas*, and upon the carrying out of it, according to him depends the national life. You must beware of this. The fact is that we have many superstitions, many bad spots and sores on our body—these have to be excised, cut off, and destroyed—but these do not destroy our religion, our national life, our spirituality. Every principle of religion is safe, and the sooner these black spots are purged away, the better the principles will shine, the more gloriously. Stick to them."[6] Vivekananda made strenuous efforts to sift the true and untrue in spiritualism, and exhorted the people not to throw away grain with chaff. He was always aware of the deep thought that had gone to the building up of the enduring structure of the *Hindu Dharma*, of the spiritual being of India, Intricate syllogisms had been used by the ancient Hindu logicians to show that spirit was real and matter was its imperfect manifes-

6. IHP P. 25.

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tation. Nivedita tells us, "With what pride he would remind the listener that, according to Hindu savants, the whole universe is only the meaning of words. After the word comes the thing. Therefore, the idea is all. And indeed, as he expounded it, the daring of the *Mimansaka* argument, the fearlessness of its admission, and the firmness of its inferences, appeared as the very glory of Hinduism . . . One day he told the story of Satyabhama's sacrifice and how the word 'Krishna,' written on a piece of paper and thrown into the balances, made Krishna himself, on the other side, kick the beam. 'Orthodox Hinduism,' he began, 'makes *sruti*, the sound, everything. The thing is but a feeble manifestation of the preexisting and eternal idea. So the name of God is everything. God himself is merely the objectification of that idea in the eternal mind. Your own name is infinitely more perfect than the person, 'You.' The name of God, is greater than God, guard you, your speech."[7] This spiritualism of India mounts high and touches the dizzy heights of subtlety. It does not however retain its remote strangeness on close examination. Does every thinker and scientist not consider a concept more real than its illustration by way of experiment ? Nascent gases participate in chemical reactions, but they are not seen, their existence can only be proved, the chemical reactions are only their changing manifestations. A point is intensely vivid to a geometry scholar but to an ordinary man it is an impossible absurdity with its 'no length, no breadth, no dimensions, but sure existence;' an ordinary man can see only the multiplicity of the point in the form of a line but where would the line be, if the point withdraws itself ?

Any final analysis of life must treat it as one unit. We talk of different entities like thought and action, sentiment and work, love and duty as if they were separate compartments; but this proves to be in the ultimate analysis a fiction. In India, systematic attempts have been made to reduce social life to a pattern, to weave the heterogenous elements into a homogeneous whole. This harmony demands sacrifice from each of its members and sacrifice is born of nobility. This nobility comes from accepting certain values outside the scope of one's private,

7. LEW p. 658.

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selfish life. Spiritualism sums up these values in a word; morals private and public are part of spiritualism. The four aims of life, viz., *Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha,* are another institution designed to foster social and individual discipline. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "If life is one then there is one master science of life which recognizes the four supreme ends of life. The Hindu code of practice thus binds together the kingdoms of earth and heaven." The special merit of this scheme is that it puts a premium on selflessness and knowledge. "In any social order one dominant group invariably subordinates others. Under the feudal constitution of society the exercise of the military function was the most esteemed. In modern capitalist organisations wealth dominates. In the Hindu scheme the cultural forms the highest and the economic the lowest, for the cultural and the spiritual are ends in themselves and are not pursued for the sake of anything else."[8] The proper synthesis would therefore be evolved only when a trained band of selfless spiritual workers are at the helm of society, and even kings, even democratic governments pay respects to them, seek their advice, and act upon it. For, out of pure selflessness comes the unerring brilliant light penetrating into the heart of a problem. Selfless people have no room for thoughts about their selfish ends; hence their whole thinking power can be concentrated on the issue in hand; and what can man's thinking power not do, once it is concentrated on one aim? These spiritual leaders, the true *Brahmins* command allegiance from the rulers, the *Kshatriyas*. "In those awful moments of life when the soul stands facing a great wrong and is torn with anguish and indignation the *Kshatriya* exclaims, 'Now you shan't do that; I'll kill you,' and the true *Brahmin* will say, 'Do not do that, I would rather die.' The higher the man the fewer are his rights and the more numerous his duties." This splendid texture of India's spirituality could indeed bring during its glorious era phenomenal material prosperity. This texture was based on mutual love, on confidence in the fundamental goodness of man.

But this balance was shattered and centuries of complacence and unmitigated prosperity took the heavy toll of defeat on the

8. HVL p. 95.

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political front. Material prosperity dwindled away, and what remained was an empty slogan of spirituality, a void. Today our eyes have opened up and we are struggling for banishing poverty and promoting decent living. This moment of transition tends to become one of downfall, warns Vivekananda. "Everything goes to show that socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, is coming on the boards. The people will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food. What guarantee have we that this, or any civilization, will last, unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man? Depend on it, religion goes to the root of the matter. If it is right all is right..... There is a goal beyond which law is not needed, Christ saw that the basis is not law, that morality and purity are the only strength. You have the saying that men cannot be made virtuous by an act of parliament. And that is why religion is of deeper importance than politics since it goes to the root, and deals with the essentials of conduct."[9] This stress on the paramount importance of religion can hardly be more needed than today. We have become independent but spirituality is conspicuous by its absence in the leaders of politics. That wing of national development remained by and large neglected. The higher positions in the political ladder are today known by the rich rewards they carry, not by the sacrifice they demand. While the common man remains as poor as ever, the leaders and handful others roll in luxuries and leave fat bank balances. How urgently we feel the need of a Vivekananda today, a fiery leader, to electrify the audience, and himself a *Sannyasin*, neither wanting a job for his relative nor a chartered plane for himself nor a four figure salary.

The golden mean of material prosperity and spiritual aspiration is thus the need of the hour. A high ideal is generally not meant for the majority, a few may renounce and reject the slightest physical comfort, not all can do that, nor should all be asked to do that. Only corruption and hypocrisy would result out of such misdirected efforts. "Too high and impossible an ideal was wrong. That had been the trouble with the Buddhist

9. *IHP* p. 39, 40.

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and Jain reformers. Too much practicality was also wrong. The two extremes must be avoided. You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields. You must be prepared to explain the intricacies of the *shastras* now, and the next moment, to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market."

Vivekananda sounded an emphatic warning to his countrymen against giving up spiritual pursuits under the pressure of modern adjuncts of society, namely politics and social reform. That would be like killing the horse in the hope of driving the cart faster. With all the material advance the need of an intelligent, sacrificing soul has but increased. The greatest machine cannot work by itself, it needs the human hand, if only to switch it on; and the hand can sooner press the trigger than press a benign switch. The training to be imparted to the hand is therefore crucial; the hand must be steeped in spirituality.

Vivekananda believes in conservation of spirituality not only on the personal level but also on the national level. Persons have been known to conserve spiritual energy by observing various practices like abstention from speech (*mauna*); celibacy is a great means to store spiritual energy. The utilization of this energy ought obviously to be internal and imperceptible; only sometimes does it manifest itself through blessings which act for the good of men; these manifestations are generally considered miracles. Hindu *Yogis* have practised conservation of spiritual energy. Some *Yogis* have been known to subsist apparently on air alone for days. They know how to withdraw the self from the body so that its dependence on the outer world is reduced to the minimum. Continuous mental resignation results in benumbing the physical need. By following this process Hindu *Yogis* have given objective examples of how the spirit is real and how, if it means, it can do away with matter.

Referring to this stern renunciation and its physical manifestation, Vivekananda declares, "The West has solved the problem of how much a man can have. India has solved the problem of how little a man can have." This spirituality

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permeates the atmosphere of India. You feel ashamed of eating in the neighbourhood of a fasting recluse. A renouncing sage makes his surroundings holy. When Vivekananda was asked how he found the strength and stamina for incessant activity, he replied "Spiritual work never tires in India." The atmosphere is charged with spirituality and one who is pure in action and sentiment can tune up his own soul and body, to receive the appropriate spiritual force which is then manifested in his blessed countenance, blessed in spite of continuous work. Earlier in this section we have referred to the theory of intertransmission of thought among minds in a similar mood. Just as a wireless receiver catches up the appropriate wavelength according to its tuning, a mind in a particular mood receives the appropriate share of related spiritual energy. An overwhelming majority of souls full of spiritual aspirations would result in the glorious effects outlined by Vivekananda. In his robust optimism he made his famous declaration, "England we shall conquer, England we shall possess by the power of spirituality."

Now has come the time for India to understand and assimilate the true import of this deep vision of our sages of the nation's glorious future. Manu proclaimed this future centuries ago. Vivekananda reiterated it and outlined the mission of India, "There has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious." The outer obstacles have now vanished, the inner obstacles remain with perhaps a tendency to grow stronger and more mischievous. We are now free to make or mar our destiny. No time could be more favourable to renew the national effort to top the world in righteousness and spirituality to fulfil the mission outlined by the sages of India, to which the inner yearnings of the nation have been a pointer even in the gloomiest days.

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23

REALISATION AND RENUNCIATION

RELIGION is realisation; it is experience, not talk; it is life, not letters; it is action, not speculation. This obvious fact is not a revelation to the Hindu or the Eastern mind though its awareness may have been a trifle blurred in the midst of the Products of the modern materialistic civilization. In most villages and towns in India one would hear of a resident or two each thereof who have renounced the world in the quest of God and have not been heard of since long. It was given to Vivekananda to proclaim this fact again. From his initial lectures at the Parliament of Religions to his last discourses the dominant note in his utterances was 'Religion is neither word nor doctrine. It is to be and to become; not to hear and to accept.' Realisation is a process of churning to the bottom of one's existence and extracting the butter of one's original nature, of restoring the butter to its pure state freeing it from the diluting milk.

Realisation can be communicated through various media. We have already referred to the rich and deep communication of spiritual experience (See Section 3). This communication is real creation—creation of tremendous spiritual energy without a material substratum; and "to create is to be like God; when you are filled with the essence of all existence whatever you say becomes true. When a selfless person lives among us his deeds become the very heartbeat of virtue." Thus this experience

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could be transmitted through word or through mere presence. An ounce of experience is worth infinitely more than a pound of verbal instruction. When Vivekananda asked one of his disciples to go to Dacca and preach, he hesitated, saying, "Swamiji, what shall I preach? I know nothing." "Then go and preach that!" was the Swami's reply, "That in itself is a great message." The awareness of ignorance is more to the point than a learned argument about knowledge. As Dr. Radhakrishnan points out, "In Hinduism, intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inward realisation. Religion is insight into the nature of reality (दर्शन) or experience of reality (अनुभव)."[1] Contrast the observations of Vivekananda on a philosophical topic, with those of a 'philosopher,' and the difference would be revealing. On *maya*, for instance, the Swami says, "It is not a theory for the explanation of the world. It is purely and simply a statement of fact" to be observed by those who have the eyes for it.

However much we may concede this, it is difficult for the intellect, trained to enter into hair-splitting arguments, to hang by the peg and play the silent onlooker. Romain Rolland reflects this mood when he comments on Vivekananda's observation on *maya* quoted above. He says, "It would be more exact to say, if criticism be allowed, that it (*maya*) is a fact of observation, insufficiently explained, if not actually unexplained, as most *Vedantic* philosophers agree."[2] The point really is that explanation is always insufficient and experience or observation is the only key to real knowledge. A glimpse of a blue object will accomplish what any amount of lecturing on what the blue colour is like cannot. After seeing the blue colour one could interpret and explain it endlessly, not before that. Of course, for this observation, one's sensitivity must be properly and adequately trained. "While Hinduism hates the compulsory conscription of men into the house of truth," remarks Radhakrishanan, "it insists on the development of one's intellectual conscience and sensibility to truth. Besides error of judgement is not moral obliquity; weakness of understanding is not depravity of heart."[3] It is not

1. HVL p. 15.
2. LVR p. 207 fn.
3. HVL p. 49.

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given to all those who realise to interpret their realisation intelligently to those who have not realised. Giant epoch-makers like Swami Vivekananda answer that demand. Although religious realisation is of a self-certifying character (स्वत:सिद्ध), although it carries its own credentials, the great seer cannot remain in isolation. He feels compelled to perform the unenviable task of finding the nearest verbal equivalent of his experience, to explain his observation in accordance with the trends of the age. Vivekananda performed this task.

The medium through which religious realisation comes is the superconscious. The conscious is known to each one of us. The subconscious and the superconscious are both different from it, but in "the one case a man goes in and comes out a fool; in the other case he goes in a man and comes out a God." There is another big difference. "The superconscious never contradicts reason. It transcends it, but contradicts it never. Faith is not belief, it is the grasp on the ultimate, an illumination."

Religion is therefore not an easy-chair affair of praying, 'Give me this, and save me from that.' It is realisation, tremendous and absolute, and giving up, complete and unreserved. Ramakrishna described through a transparent parable the real nature of intellectual acrobats talking religion day and night. "The vulture rises high and high until he becomes a speck, but his eye is always on the piece of rotten carrion on the earth." This was indeed a revolutionary view depriving the philosopher of his scrupulously contrived status. In the West, especially, "plans of salvation meant intellectual gymnastics, plans which are never worked out, never brought into practical life. The preacher who talks the best is the best preacher."

Equating religion with realisation must naturally result in evolving elaborate methods of teaching. In the West religion at best ended in faith in God and praying to him, the knowledge needed for doing this exercise without any qualms of conscience was that of God's greatness reflected in some legends. "The methods of religious teaching" says Sister Christine, "to which we of the West have become accustomed is that we are told the results of the experiments, much as if a child were given a problem in arithmetic and were told its answer but given no instruction as to how the result is reached." What a refreshing

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thrill must have been in store for the intelligent child of the West as well as the East when the master had come out with the method ! Christine's reaction is fairly typical. She relates, "He told us that God was real, a reality which could be experienced just as tangibly as any other reality; that there were methods by which these experiments could be made which were as exact as laboratory methods of experiment."[4]

Again it was because religion meant realisation to the Hindus that some so-called inconsistencies like polytheism have found room in it. In a laboratory one worker may use a beaker, another a flask, where a metal wire in needed one may use iron, another copper; polytheism in Hinduism represents just such differences. Symbols, rituals and images are the support of 'spiritual childhood' and one transcends them in his 'spiritual manhood.'

The first step towards realisation is renunciation, and renunciation means rejecting both pleasure and pain. "The cause of all the miseries we have in the world is that men foolishly think pleasure to be the ideal to strive for. After a time man finds that it is not happiness, but knowledge, towards which he is going, and that both pleasure and pain are great teachers, and he learns as much from evil as from good."[5] The snow-haired sages of the *Upanishads* have declared,

> Not by wealth, not by progeny, but by renunciation alone is immortality reached.

This too is the result of an experiment conducted by kings like *Yayati*, who, borrowing the youth of his son, enjoyed the pleasures of youth all over again. He sought satisfaction of passion in fulfilling it, but the end of passion was never in sight. A memorable verse in the Mahabharata embodies this result:

> Indeed, longing is not calmed down by enjoying pleasures, it only increases again like fire due to an oblation.

Renunciation is therefore the first need of practical religion. Even for the limited objective of getting rid of misery which everyone strives for, renunciation is the only way.

4. Rem. p. 174, 175.
5. KY p. 1.

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Renunciation results from austerities. Renunciation is giving up all longing, and be happy in that. The habits of a lifetime and many past lives have to be moulded. Naturally the will has to be trained to cast off the desire for traditional pleasures, The training of the will is the object of the various austerities like abstention from speech for some period, eating only once a day, etc. After a time the will would not, as a matter of habit have any desire for bodily pleasures. Here therefore comes in practical religion; a science of these practices, a system and gradation of these experiments has to be evolved to serve all categories of inclination and ability. The classes which Vivekananda held in the West as well as the East offered instruction in these practices. Although man is God, he is in delusion. "This delusion that you are Mr. so and so or Mrs. so and so can be got rid of by another delusion, and that is practice. Fire will eat fire, and you can use one delusion to conquer another. Cloud will come and brush away another cloud and then both will go away. Controlled desire leads to the highest results." The energy frittered away in the fulfilment of unlimited desires is harnessed to realisation. Restraint in sexual life is the most important part of renunciation, for sexual energy is transformed into spiritual energy. Ultimately a stage in renunciation is reached when one can take the position of another. Normally we are temperamentally incapable of taking the position of others. When restraint in one's desires becomes a habit with us, we are able to identify ourselves with others. If I am all, why can I not really and actively sympathise with my brother and see with his eyes?

Renunciation is the natural order of evolution. No man can eat with the relish of a famished dog or wolf. The happiness of animals is centred in the body, the higher the man the less his happiness in bodily enjoyments and more in mental pleasures. Art, literatue serve a great purpose here; they are avenues chalked out by man to get those higher mental enjoyments. The highest man finds happiness in the knowledge of his identity with whatever exists. Viewed in this light renunciation is the way to enternal enjoyment, to permanent happiness. The perfect man is aware of the treasure he has, and is therefore the richest. "A rich man buys a picture at a cost of a hundred thousand

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dollars perhaps, but it is the man who understands art that enjoys it; and if the buyer is without knowledge of art it is useless to him, he is only the owner. All over the world, it is the wise man who enjoys the happiness of the world. The ignorant man never enjoys; he has to work for others unconsciously."[6]

Renunciation is therefore a source of immense grandeur, it is not helpless resignation; it is the nobility of the possessor of everything. It inspires cheer and greatness at moments of direst calamity. It inculcates greatness in small things. Vivekananda adored Philip Sidney's greatness, the innate nobility he showed by passing on the glass of water to another soldier while he himself lay dying on the battle-field. He had renounced, had become another.[7] Vivekananda told the story of "a man in India, a *Sannyasin*, who used to repeat '*Sivoham*' (I am He); a tiger jumped on him one day and dragged him away and killed him, and as long as he was living, the sound came, '*Sivoham, Sivoham!*'"

Renunciation is the basic step of every path of knowledge. It is the turning point in all the various *Yogas*. The *Karmin* (worker) renounces the fruits of his work, the *Bhakta* (devotee) renounces all little loves for the almighty and omnipresent love; the *Yogi* (practising psychic control) renounces his petty experiences for the rich experience of *Advaita*; and the *Jnanin* renounces everything.

It is inspiring to note how this lordly monk was himself a visual symbol of renunciation. "He moved fearless and unhesitant through the luxury of the West" observes Sister Nivedita, "As determinedly as I had seen him in India, dressed in the two garments of simple folk, sitting on the floor and eating with his fingers, so, equally without doubt or shrinking, was his acceptance of the complexity of the means of living in America or France. Monk and king, he said, were the obverse and reverse of the same medal. From the use of the best to the renunciation of all is but one step."[8]

6. SPR p. 75.
7. Sir Philip Sidney [1554-1586], noted English novelist and critic, met a hero's death on the battle-field.
8. LEW p. 698.

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Vivekananda was very proud of the institution of *Sannyasa;* it represented the purest form of spiritual practice and unmixed longing for the highest knowledge. In 1900 he took up cudgels against Justice Ranade for criticizing the Hindu *Sannyasins.* His deep conviction of the greatness of *Sannyasa* appears to have deepened as years rolled by. In the midst of the Himalayas he was full of the fervour of renunciation, and remarked in 1900, "Never forget to say to yourself, and to teach to your childern, 'As is the difference between a firefly and the blazing sun, between the infinite ocean and a little pond, between a mustardseed and the mountain of Meru, such is the difference between the householder and the *Sannyasin*!'"[9] He gave some credit even to fraudulent *Sannyasins,* for they were witness to the high ideal, and were in some degree the cause of the success of others. He could not tolerate the slightest hint, even an unmeant one, of placing a *Sannyasin* in a subordinate position. He wrote in 1896 about a phrase in a pamphlet, "It was an awful mistake in the Greenacre programme that it was printed that Saradananda was there by the kind permission of Mr. Sturdy. Who is Mr. Sturdy or anyone else to permit a *Sannyasin*?"[10]

Yet another mood also prevailed with him when he glorified the householder's lot and maintained that it led to renunciation. "The householder was bound by his consciousness of an inferior lot. His part was *Karma.* Renunciation was nothing to him. But renunciation is the whole law. It is all illusion that anyone has been trying to do anything else. We are all struggling to release this great mass of energy. What does that mean but that we are hurrying towards death as fast as we can? The burly Englishman who thinks he wants to possess the earth is really struggling more than most of us to die. Self-preservation is only a mode of renunciation. The desire for life is only one method of the love of death."[11] At such moments Vivekananda shows himself an expert conventional philosopher with his love

9. LEW p. 584. The second part of the comparison should read 'a little pond and the infinite ocean.'
10. Let. p. 334.
11. Rem. p. 285.

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of exploring intricate implications of a concept. On many occasions he expressed his contempt for false monks. Giving sound practical counsel to the householder inclined spiritually he said, "One should renounce only after one has got control over one's mind while still at home. Else one gets mixed up with the hemp —smoking monk once the first charm wears away." A penetrating warning indeed! Discussing how a householder should strike a balance between his spiritual urge and his duties as a householder which would suffer neglect due to his renunciation, he referred to Ramakrishna's famous parable which runs as follows, "A poisonous snake in a meadow became a terror to the cowherds and passers-by who had to cross it. At last a monk came that way, and as usual, the snake attacked him also. But the monk was more than a match for it. He not only subdued the snake, but also got a promise from it that it would not bite people any more. The monk took it into his discipleship, gave it a *mantra* (sacred charm) and departed. The snake became so harmless from that day that the cowherd boys began to take liberty with it, till at last they gave it such a beating one day that it was all but dead. Somehow it dragged itself into its hole and lay there for days together, till at last the monk came that way once again. He called for the snake and searched for it. At long last the snake somehow wriggled out of the hole and related the whole incident. The monk said, 'The fool that you are ! I asked you not to bite, but you could have hissed, just to scare away the boys.' "

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24

THE PATH OF THE INTELLECT

(Jnana-Yoga)

KNOWLEDGE, again, is all one. "It is not that secular and spiritual knowledge are two opposite and contradictory things; but they are the same thing—the same infinite knowledge, which is everywhere fully present, from the lowest atom to the highest *Brahman*—they are the same knowledge in the different stages of gradual development." During one's progress on this path many stages may be met and crossed; each one of these stages is crucial in the attainment of the knowledge of the Absolute. This knowledge is "the innate nature of the human soul and the essential birthright of every man. The human soul is the repository of infinite wisdom, what external agency can illuminate it?"[1] Intensive practices like *Jnana-Yoga* only hasten man's progress towards knowledge. Aurobindo indeed defines *Yoga* as a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life of a few years or even a few months of bodily existence. Electric batteries of the same size may differ in their voltage; human lives of the same length may similarly embody spiritual attainments of different intensity depending on their practice of *Yoga*.

1. KY pp. 364, 366.

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On one otherwise trivial occasion the Swami discoursed beautifully on the relative merits and positions of *Jnana-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga*. It was remarked that a gentleman was an expert in music, but loved road engineering; and he was indifferent to what people said about his music, but very sensitive to opinions on his performance in the other field. "Then, in our amusement," says Sister Nivedita, "we all teased Swami for his carelessness about his religious teacherhood and his vanity about his portrait-painting; and he suddenly said, 'You see there is one thing called love, and there is another thing called union; and union is greater than love. I do not love religion, I have become identified with it. It is my life; so no man loves that thing in which his life has been spent, in which he really has accomplished something. That which we love is not yet oneself. This is the difference between *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Jnana* (knowledge), and this is why *Jnana* is greater than *Bhakti*.'"[2]

Jnana-Yoga consists in taking away the mind from the pleasures of the senses and concentrating it on the idea of universal unity. "The external world is far away from the centre; and so there is no common ground in it where all the phenomena of existence can meet." Therefore the path of the intellect does not take any physical or mental help. Philosophic reasoning, knowledge and his own will are the only instrumentality a seeker by this path believes in; then he has to mould his conduct in conformity with the concept of the unity of all existence. This is called '*Titiksha*' (forbearance), bearing every pain without murmuring and complaining. "When an injury comes do not mind it. If a tiger comes, stand there, who flies?.....There are men who sleep on the banks of the Ganga in the midsummer sun of India, and in winter float in the water of the Ganga for a whole day; they do not care. Men sit in the snow of the Himalayas, and do not care to wear any garment. What is heat? What is cold? Let things come and go, what is that to me? I am not the body."[3] In this way the mind transcends the body, the soul, and ultimately realisation of the fundamental unity of all existence dawns. *Jnana-Yoga* does not envisage retirement

2. Rem. p. 280.
3. SPR pp. 71, 72.

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in seclusion as a necessary prerequisite. For, the first qualification for pursuing this path is 'renunciation of all *fruits* of work'[4] and not of all work. Nonetheless, renunciation of work would in most cases go naturally with that of fruits thereof and *Jnana-Yoga* does not therefore preclude renunciation of all work as far as possible.

4. SPR p. 71.

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25

THE PATH OF ACTION

(Karma-Yoga)

THE WORD '*Karma*' (action) is used in a special sense in the context of *Karma-Yoga*. Vivekananda's definition of *Karma* is as follows: "Every mental and physical blow that is given to the soul, by which, as it were, fire is struck from it, and by which its own power and knowledge are discovered, is *Karma*, this word being used in its widest sense."[1] The clause 'by which..... discovered' does not exclude any action; it describes the function performed by every little action, and indicates that this function is of supreme importance in *Karma-Yoga*, for *Karma-Yoga* helps the soul discover 'its own power and knowledge.' This fundamental function performed by *Karma* is not ordinarily recognized for its real significance; *Karma-Yoga* raises it to the pivotal position. Vivekananda therefore defines *Karma-Yoga* as "the knowledge of the secret of work."[2]

It would not be possible to define a unit of *Karma*. When we speak of one action, we formulate a temporary unit, but this 'one' action can be divided further and each of these divisions may also be called 'one action.' Similarly "there are certain works which are, as it were, the aggregate, the sumtotal, of a large number of smaller works." Small actions are, as it were,

1. KY p. 4.
2. KY p. 113.

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the waves on the sea of large works. Existence is the boundless expanse of *Karma*, and one human life is only a small part of it. Vivekananda says beautifully, "A current rushing down of its own nature falls into a hollow and makes a whirlpool, and after running a little in that whirlpool, it emerges again in the form of the free current to go on unchecked. Each human life is like that current."[3]

The law of *Karma* is 'like *Karma*, like fruit.' Each action has its impact on the will. "Machines or instruments, cities, ships, all these are simply the manifestation of the will of man; and this will is caused by character, and character is manufactured by *Karma*. As is *Karma*, so is the manifestation of the will."[4] The inherent ability of man is the overall fruit of his *Karma*. The outward appearance of one's life does not always indicate the real status of a man as man. "We may go on accumulating things for our physical enjoyment, but only what we earn is really ours. A fool may buy all the books in the world, but he will be able to read only those that he deserves to; and this deserving is produced by *Karma*."[5] Bhartrihari's dictum See: the pot takes in the same amount of water in the well as in the ocean, is here to the point.

The two fundamental urges of *nivritti* (revolving away) and *pravritti* (revolving towards) find their expression in *Jnana-Yoga* and *Karma-Yoga* respectively. "Do not fly away from the wheel of the world-machine," says Vivekananda, "but stand inside it and learn the secret of it; that is the way of *Karma-Yoga*."[6] Inactivity should be avoided by all means. Inactivity means stagnation; activity means resistance and progress. Vivekananda once asked a rickety youth, "Can you tell a lie?" On his saying 'No', he told him, "Then you must learn to do so. It is better to tell a lie than to be a brute or a log of wood." When one can resist evil successfully one develops the capacity of resisting the faculty of resistance, and goes beyond it; then comes contented calmness.

3. KY p. 112.
4. KY p. 6.
5. KY p. 7.
6. LVR p. 223.

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When one determines to plunge into the pool of incessant activity the problem of selection of the field of work arises. Vivekananda echoes the age-old dictum of the *Gita* in this context: Death in one's own sphere of duty is meritorious; an alien sphere of duty is horrible.[7] This principle represents an ideal because it is practically very useful. "Every man should take up his own ideal and endeavour to accomplish it; that is a surer way of progress than taking up other men's ideals which he can never hope to accomplish."[8] Every man is naturally fit for some duties and often effortlessly glides into them. But he is attracted towards the lot of another. "Man never examines himself. He thinks he is quite as fit to be on the throne as the king. Even if he is, he must first show that he has done the duty of his position; and then higher duties will come to him."[9] There is an inner law working with an unperceived but unerring logic assigning duties to men and women. "Our duties are determined by our deserts to a much larger extent than we are willing to grant. Competition rouses envy, and it kills the kindliness of the heart."[10]

Good and evil are inextricably mixed up in every action. The most innocent action is unnoticeably pregnant with evil. A single breath kills numberless living germs. The noble duty of patriotism involves the killing of invaders. We kill flies and mosquitoes and call the result clean and decent living. "There have been sects in this world who have in an astoundingly preposterous way preached slow suicide as the only means to get out of the world, because, if a man lives he has to kill poor little animals and plants or do injury to something or someone."

Standards of morality in different countries vary greatly. What is abhorrent in one country is often sacred in another. In his ignorance man seeks purity of action in the content of action, borrows a fragment here, alters an end there; but he little knows that good and evil are inextricably interlaced.

The solution is therefore not in the content but in the method. *Karma-Yoga* proclaims this momentous method: work

7. Chapter III/30.
8. KY p. 21.
9. KY p. 61.
10. KY p. 69.

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without being attached to the fruits of work. The crux of *Karma-Yoga* is doing one's duty without attachment. *Karma-Yoga* is the clarion call of devotion to duty with nonchalant indifference for the results of action. Non-attachment absolves man from the responsibility of suffering the results of action and ultimately frees him from the bondage of *Karma*. "Every good work we do without any ulterior motive, instead of forging a new chain, will break one of the links in the existing chains." Non-attachment is like a rain-coat; it protects one from the results of one's actions, it directs them elsewhere.

Non-attachment infuses fearlessness, strength and power to concentrate. It therefore improves the quality of the work immensely. As Vivekananda points out, even the lowest shoe-black, if he gives more concentration, will black shoes better; the cook with concentration will cook a meal all the better. *Karma-Yoga* does not envisage faith in any God, though such faith would help one in being non-attached. Cultivation of stern non-attachment would ultimately lead one to the transcendental state beyond the bondage of *Karma* and its fruit. "Although a man has not attained a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God and never has believed, although he has not prayed even once in his whole life, if the simple power of good actions has brought him to the state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived at the same point to which the religious man will come through his prayers and the philosopher through his knowledge."[11]

Non-attachment is not easy; it demands tremendous restraint. Pure, unselfish, dispassionate love is the only alchemy that transforms severe duty into a pleasant experience. Duty is seldom sweet. It is only when love greases its wheels that it runs smoothly; it is a continuous friction otherwise. "With love there is no painful reaction; love only brings a reaction of bliss; if it does not, it is not love." As Ramakrishna often remarked, one should look upon one's children as a nurse does. She looks after the mistress's children with scrupulous attention, keeps them clean and healthy, and contributes to their growth, but

11. LVR p. 220.

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the day she wants to give up the assignment, she does so without the least qualm.

Non-attachment divests work of its element of compulsion. When I do not want any benefit from the work I do it freely, not under compulsion, and I can abandon it any moment. Everything that is done under compulsion goes to build up attachment. Vivekananda enunciated this principle in a succinct phrase: Work like a master, not like a slave. "Look at these poor slaves to duty! Duty leaves them no time to say prayers; no time to bathe. Duty makes them miserable."

Karma-Yoga is the path of self-reliance. No dependence on the teacher is presupposed here; no instruction required but that obtained through experience. The message of self-reliance given by the *Gita* (VI/5) assumes its full import in *Karma-Yoga*.* "The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past *Karma*, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or lose."[12]

The broad definition of action includes thought as well as word. A man's thoughts, deeds, and words flow from the same

*There appears to be no doubt that in Vivekananda's opinion the essential message of the *Gita* is *Karma-Yoga*. The whole pamphlet entitled 'Thoughts on the *Gita*' incorporating his exquisite lectures given in San Francisco and elsewhere reverberates this opinion. The last two sentences are decisive. "To work without motive, to work unattached, brings the highest bliss and freedom. This secret of *Karma-Yoga* is taught by Lord Shri Krishna in the *Gita*." It surprises me therefore that the publisher (Swami Gambhirananda, President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora) of 'Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda' says in his note, ".....the publisher does not necessarily subscribe to all the opinions expressed in them. For instance, B. G. Tilak's belief that Swamiji agreed with him that the *Gita* does not speak of monasticism.....(is) palpably wrong....." For one thing, Tilak uses the word 'renunciation' and not 'monasticism' (Rem. p. 21). Secondly, Tilak's belief is absolutely correct. Thirdly, it is generally believed that Tilak was the first scholar to expound in detail the '*Karma-Yoga*' interpretation of the *Gita*; but Vivekananda had anticipated him. This is yet another example of his exceptionally original scholarship.

12. LVR p. 75.

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inner character which is the accumulated result of his past actions. That is why the same words spoken by different persons differ tremendously in their impact. Anybody could say the five words 'Sisters and brothers of America'; but only when they rushed out from the lips of Vivekananda had they their historic impact. In a piece of practical counsel given to Haripada Mitra Vivekananda said, "Know it for certain that the ideas we entertain about others express themselves through our conduct; and even though we may not express these in words, people react accordingly. We see in the external world the same image that we carry in our hearts: nobody realizes how true the saying 'The world is good when I am good' is."[13] If we remember the abiding unity of thought, word and deed, the unexpected behaviour of others with us would no longer pose a puzzle. In a penetrating observation Vivekananda says, "You hear fanatics glibly saying, 'I do not hate the sinner, I hate the sin'; but I am prepared to go any distance to see the face of that man who can really make a distinction between the sin and the sinner."[14] Every *Karma-Yogin* should grasp this principle and not try to cheat the world by saying something he does not mean, and doing something against what he professes. Such hypocrisy is the basest behaviour and harms its practiser most.

The more we concentrate on the quality of work rather than its conventional station, the better we can appreciate Vivekananda's favourite idea of the greatness of small things. "More and more" says he, "the greatness seems to me that of the worm doing its duty silently, steadily from moment to moment and hour to hour." We bow with the greatest reverence to the unknown soldier falling for the country, to the sincere labourer working on the farm, to the selfless worker of an organization like the Ramakrishna Mission and the hidden *Yogi* merging with the universal existence in the lofty Himalayas.

Karma-Yoga pins down the present character to the past actions, and thus nips in the bud the vanity of doing good to the world. To the philanthropist, Vivekananda asks, "Why should you be proud of having given away something? You

13. Rem. p. 36.
14. KY Ch. v.

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are the porter that carried the money or other kind of gift, and the world deserved it by its own *karma*." Of course we should always try to help the world, to serve the needy, that is the noblest motive of work; but its real purpose is to make us forget ourselves, the first step in realising the essential unity of universal existence. The famous meeting of Vivekananda with Rockefeller makes very enlightening reading in this context. The Swami told him his past and asked him to use his enormous treasures for charitable purposes. Rockefeller soon after made his first philanthropic gestures, and told Vivekananda to thank him. The Swami replied that it was for the millionaire to thank the monk.[15]

15. SVA p. 413.

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26

THE PATH OF DEVOTION

[Bhakti-Yoga]

BHAKTI-YOGA is recommended for those spiritual aspirants who are not interested in intellectual quibbles on God, but find solace in worshipping God, the repository of Infinite Love. They start with loving God as a superintending deity, as the supreme parent, and reach the ideal of viewing God everywhere. The stages of the devotee's love for God are indicated by Vivekananda as follows:

(a) Man is fearful and needs help.

(b) Man sees God as father.

(c) Man sees God as mother. Here real love begins.

(d) He loves for the sake of love—beyond all other qualities and beyond good and evil.

(e) He realises love in Divine Union.[1]

This last beautiful state of 'divine madness' was reflected quite often in Vivekananda's mood. In a wonderfully touching letter written on July 6, 1896, he traces his progress on the path of divine love. "At twenty I was the most unsympathetic, uncompromising fanatic; I would not walk on the footpath, on

1. Complete Works, Vol. VI, p. 55.

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the theatre-side of the streets in Calcutta. At thirty-three I can live in the same house with prostitutes and never would think of saying a word of reproach to them. Is it degenerate? Or is it that I am broadening out into that Universal Love which is the Lord Himself." The letter ends to the sweet note of 'divine madness.' "Whom to praise, whom to blame, it is all His play!" he exclaims, "They want explanations, but how can you explain Him? He is brainless, nor has he any reason. He is fooling us with little brains and reason, but this time he won't find me napping.

"I have learnt a thing or two: beyond, beyond reason and learning and talking is the feeling, the 'Love,' the 'Beloved.' Aye, fill me the cup and we will be mad."[2] A deeper expression of divine ecstasy is hard to find. Within the severe, strong, rational exterior of Vivekananda flowed a placid current of tender love. Vivekananda's intellectual nature was in sharp contrast with Ramakrishna's devotional nature. But both shared knowledge and devotion alike. It was often remarked that while the master was outwardly a *Bhakta* and inwardly a *Jnanin*, the disciple was outwardly a *Jnanin* and inwardly a *Bhakta*.

The state of divine union attained by a devotee is perhaps not exactly the same as that reached by a *Jnanin*. A reference to Vivekananda's view in the matter has already been made. Sankara, the great teacher of *Advaita*, was also an equally ardent devotee. He describes his ultimate union with God in the following beautiful verse.

Though the difference (between You and I) has vanished,
O Master,
I am yours, You are not mine;
The wave belongs to the sea,
Nowhere does the sea belong to the wave.

The devotee's individuality merges in the Divine Infinite, but does not become coextensive with it; the *Jnanin's* becomes so.

Bhakti-Yoga can be practised only by those whose hearts are tender, sensitive and overflowing with faith. Such persons

2. LEW p. 419-420.

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must be able to tell inspiration from deception, otherwise they are liable to be misguided by false teachers. Vivekananda gives elaborate criteria to judge the genuineness of the guidance offered to, or the intuition rushing from the heart of the devotee. He says, "In the first place, inspiration must not contradict reason. The old man does not contradict the child, he is the development of the child. What we call inspiration is the development of reason. The way to intuition is through reason . . .

"Secondly, inspiration must be for the good of one and all; and not for name or fame or personal gain. It should always be for the good of the world, and perfectly unselfish."[3]

Symbols and rituals form a necessary part of *Bhakti-Yoga*. The higher the devotee rises the more he transcends them and concentrates on the attributes of God in the non-visual form. Tracing the history of symbols Vivekananda says, "From time immemorial symbols have been used by all kinds of religions. In one sense we cannot think but in symbols; words themselves are symbols of thought. In another sense everything in the universe may be looked upon as a symbol . . . The circle has been a great symbol throughout the world. Then there is the most universal of all symbols, the *svastika* (卐) used by all from Babylon and Egypt to the Buddhists. . . . There must be some natural association between these symbols and the human mind."[4]

In Hinduism the idea of the One pervading all existence curiously coexists with the images galore. Excesses of image-addiction and ritual-mindedness are common among the Hindus. Adjustment of the lofty idea with the narrow ritual of image-worship also appears to be inherent in the Hindu's make-up. Several observers have testified to this quality. Vincent Shean says, "The late Bhagwan Das of the Hindu University at Varanasi told me that he once watched a carpenter working at a wooden idol he was making for some feast day in a village. Bhagwan Das asked him what it was and the man told him the name of that deity. Bhagwan Das said, 'Yes, but what does

3. LVR p. 246.
4. KY pp. 70, 72.

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this mean to you ? Is there a God in that piece of wood ?' The man said, 'It is only a sign, a representation. God is in me and in you and above.[5]' "

In the Census Report for 1911, Burns observes, "The general result of my enquiries is that the great majority of Hindus have a firm belief in one supreme God" (Part I, p. 362). Herbert Risley says, "If you talk to a fairly intelligent Hindu peasant about the *Paramatman, Karma, Maya, Mukti* and so forth, you will find as soon as he has got over his surprise at your interest in such matters that the terms are familiar to him, and that he has formed a rough working theory of their bearing on his own future."[6]

But unfortunately this is not the complete picture. Abuses of ritual and symbolism are wide-spread in India. A glance at the crowds assembled at any centre of pilgrimage is sufficient to convince anyone of the terrible priestly exploitation of the innocent devotee. The inflexible rigidity of the ritual as prescribed by the priest is mainly responsible for this predicament. An offering to Lord Krishna presided over by the priest must tax the devotee's purse to a certain extent; the injunction of the Lord Himself is beside the point: "Whosoever gives me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water; I enjoy that (offering) offered with devotion by the high-souled one."[7] The efforts of the Central and State Governments and various social organizations to divest ritual of its present ills are a good augury; they are limited today; they should cover all such places where deception is practised in the name of religion. Vivekananda was personally indifferent to ritual but allowed it and said, "Without it there would be nothing but intellect here (pointing to his forehead), and dry thought."[8] The ritual which he sanctioned was of course genuine and adaptable. He unequivocally condemned priestly tyranny and considered it a serious social scourge.

5. WVM p. 9.
6. HVL p. 54.
7. LVR p. 186.
8. LVR p. 186.

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He was keenly aware of the risks involved in the path of devotion. This path sought by many as a refuge from duty is infested by what Vivekananda calls 'sentimental nonsense.' India needs people doing their duty steadfastly, far too many people have been indulging in whipping out fruitless tears and dancing in the temples. *Bhakti-Yaga* is not the need of the hour, let it be reserved for the real devotees whose life would be impossible without *bhakti*. Let others follow *Karma-Yoga*. An indigestion of *Bhakti* is one of the diseases of the Hindu social life. Vivekananda exhorts in an interview, "And wherever you hear the Radha-Krishna songs going on, use the whip right and left. The whole nation is going to rack and ruin ! People having no self-control indulging in such songs ! Even the slightest impurity is a great hindrance to the conception of these high ideals. Is it a joke ? We have long sung and danced; no harm if there is a full for a time. In the meanwhile let the country wax strong."[9]

Just as Vivekananda unreservedly condemned these pseudo-devotees, he warned sincere devotees against the dangers in their path. In a well-timed advice he cautioned some of his associates, "The effusion of sentiment which is not attended by a corresponding transformation of character and which is not strong enough to destroy the cravings of lust and gold by awakening in the heart an enthusiasm for the vision of God, is neither deep nor of any real value in the realm of spirituality. Physical contortions, tears, horripilations, and even momentary trance which result from this wrong emotion are, in reality, hysterical. These should be controlled by a determined effort. If that fails, one should take a nutritious diet or even consult a doctor. For unconsciously you are feigning these things. It is only in rare individuals of gigantic spirituality that those emotions, overflowing the walls of restraint and appearing as trance or the shedding of tears, etc., are genuine. But ignorant people do not realize this and think that these outward symptoms, of themselves, indicate deep spiritual fervour. So instead of practising restraint, devotion and renunciation, they studiously cultivate these effusions with the result that their

9. LEW p. 376.

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weakened nerves respond in this way to the slightest religious stimulus. If this is allowed to go on unchecked, the result is physical and mental disaster. Of one hundred persons who take up the spiritual life eighty turn out to be charlatans and fifteen become insane. Only the remaining five may be blessed with a vision of real truth. Therefore beware."[10]

10. LEW p. 126.

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27

THE PATH OF PSYCHIC CONTROL

(*Raja-Yoga*)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S lectures on *Raja-Yoga* were published in book-form in 1896. The first of his *Yoga* lectures to be offered in book-form, they made a deep impression on the American mind. They attracted the attention of eminent physiologists and psychologist William James. Later they aroused the enthusiasm of Tolstoy. His claim that meditation brought about the extension and development of the human faculties and produced supernormal experiences, hitherto classified as miraculous phenomena, made many Americans anxious to practise *Raja-Yoga.*

The state of our mind is horribly disturbed. "Normally we waste our energies. Not only are they squandered in all directions by the tornado of exterior impressions, but even when we manage to shut doors and windows, we find chaos within ourselves, a multitude like the one that greeted Julius Caesar in the Roman Forum; thousands of unexpected and undesirable guests invade and trouble us."[1] The path of psychic control teaches us how to enforce discipline on the mind, on the nervous system. It tries to remove earlier impressions and substitute new ones. Aurobindo defines *Raja-Yoga* as follows: "All *Raja-Yoga* depends on this perception and experience: that our inner

1. LVR p. 255.

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elements, combinations, functions, forces can be separated or dissolved, can be newly combined or set to novel and formerly impossible uses or can be transformed and resolved into a new general synthesis by fixed internal processes."[2] *Raja-Yoga* is, therefore, conquest of knowledge by the most perfect instrument of scientific knowledge: absolute concentration.

Concentration means assuming full control over the mind. The great difficulty one encounters while trying to control one's mind has been haunting man for centuries. Arjuna has voiced it in the *Gita* (6/34). Having himself undergone the stresses and strains of whipping the galloping mind into submission Vivekananda was fully aware of the magnitude of the task. "All are under the delusion that they allow the mind some freedom knowingly." He warned, "When one sits for meditation, one can very well understand how much control one really has over the mind. Even when one wants to think of a certain matter for some time, one cannot keep the mind fixed on that subject for so long as ten minutes."[3] The importance of keeping the mind constantly under check cannot be over-emphasized. Romain Rolland glorified the ancient *Yogins* of India who "did not wait for Dr. Freud to teach them that the best cure for the mind is to make it look its deeply hidden monsters straight in the face."[4]

An objection raised by Romain Rolland against *Raja-Yoga* may well be discussed here. He says, "But I rightly condemn the Indian *Yogin* for taking as proved what nobody as yet has been able to prove experimentally . . . Strict analysis has never accepted experiences of which the experimentalist, however authoritative, was the sole judge and participator."[5] The *Raja-Yogin* (the practiser of *Raja-Yoga*) never denies the value of experiment. In fact the crux of *Raja-Yoga* is experiment. The latter statement of Rolland is however not valid. The *Raja-Yogin* eagerly invites other people to act as judges over his experiments; his complaint is that the response is very poor. To act as a judge in this matter is nevertheless extremely

2. LVR p. 219.
3. Rem. p. 37.
4. LVR p. 268.
5. LVR p. 257, 258.

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difficult. It is well known that Ramakrishna welcomed Vivekananda's investigations in his realizations. The only valid and constructive attitude is that enunciated marvellously by Rolland himself. He says, "I do not deny. I wait for the proof." But one fundamental requirement appears to have been overlooked here. For understanding and interpreting the proof a minimum standard, some sort of realization is necessary. Even in objective material sciences every experiment presupposes a minimum standard of attainment on the part of the student. The lowest experiments may be comprehended by almost everybody; but the higher ones cannot be understood by one not having the requisite training. Does Vivekananda not say in the opening chapter of his '*Raja-Yoga*', "In the study of this *Raja-Yoga* no faith or belief is necessary. Believe nothing until you find it out for yourself . . . Every human being has the right and the power to seek for religion."? Fundamentally there are two branches of human intellectual activity. In the first, objective appraisal is to the point; in the second, subjective experience is to the point. The doctor's attitude towards cholera belongs to the first field; the cholera patient's to the second; his intellect struggles to experience health. After getting that experience he may analyse it; but he can in no case do it prior to getting the experience. Religion may be studied objectively as well as experienced subjectively. *Yoga* is practical religion, experience of a process, belonging to the second of these two categories. How can you challenge a particular statement of a cholera patient describing his experience of a particular stage in his ailment? You cannot do so because you do not have the proper equipment, just as you cannot fly because you have no wings. You can assemble the various experiences of the *Yogins*, analyse them, frame a theory out of them; but you cannot challenge their truth unless you undergo the same process, have your experiences to juxtapose with theirs. "There is no mystery in what I teach. . . . . ." said Vivekananda, "Anything that is secret and mysterious in these systems of *Yoga* should at once be rejected. . . . . .Mystery-mongering weakens the human brain."

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A succinct account of the essentials of *Raja-Yoga* composed of extracts from the original[6] will be a fitting end to this discussion.

"*Raja-Yoga* is as much a science as any in the world. It is an analysis of the mind, gathering the facts of the super-sensuous world and so building up the spiritual world.

"Concentration of the mind is the source of all knowledge.

"*Yoga* teaches us to make matter our slave, as it ought to be. *Yoga* means yoke, that is, to join the soul of man to the supreme soul of God.

"Mind acts in and under consciousness. What we call consciousness is only one link in the infinite chain that is our nature.

"Through faithful practice layer after layer of mind opens before us and each reveals new facts to us. We see, as it were, new worlds created before us, new powers are put into our hands but we must not stop by the way or allow ourselves to be dazzled by these 'beads of glass' when the mine of diamonds lies before us.

"Three things are necessary to the student who wishes to succeed.

"First: Give up all ideas of enjoyment in this world and in the next.

"Second: Intense desire to know Truth and God.

"Third: The sixfold training.

"We can be conscious of the absolute but we can never express it. The moment we try to express it, we limit it and it ceases to be absolute.

"Purity, patience and perseverance are the three great pre-requisites.

"The best time for practice is the junction of day and night, the calmest time in the tides of our bodies.

"Lesson 1: After bathing sit down and hold the seat firm, that is, imagine that you sit as firm as a rock, that nothing can move you. Hold the head and shoulders and the hips in a straight line, keeping the spinal column free; all action is along it, and it must not be impaired.

6. SLRY.

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".....take a long breath through both nostrils, throw it out again and hold it out as long as you comfortably can. Take four such breaths, then breathe naturally and pray for illumination.

"Tell your manifestations to no one but your *Guru*. Talk as little as possible.

"Controlling the mental powers is the first great aim in *Yoga* practices. The second is concentrating them in full force upon any subject.

"Lesson 2: The subject of this lesson is *Pranayama* or controlling the *Prana*, the breath. In *Raja-Yoga* breathing enters the psychic plane and brings us to the spiritual.....It acts upon the lungs, the lungs on the heart, the heart upon the circulation, this in turn upon the brain and the brain upon the mind.....Most of our action is from outside in. Outside nature throws us off our balance and we cannot throw nature off her balance. This is all wrong; the stronger power is really within.

"*Pranayama* has three parts: 1, *Puraka*—inhaling; 2, *Kumbhaka*—restraining; 3, *Rechaka*—exhaling.

"There are two currents passing through the brain and circulating down the spine, crossing at the base and returning to the brain again..... By concentration we can learn to feel them and trace them over all part of the body. These currents are intimately connected with breathing and by regulating this we get control of the body.

"This breathing must be done with rhythmic regularity and the easiest way is by counting.

"Lesson 3: We must give a new direction to the sun and moon currents and open for them a new passage through the spinal cord. When we succeed in bringing the currents through the *Sushumna* up to the pineal gland, we are for the time being separated entirely from the body.

"The nervous centre at the base of the spine near the sacrum is most important. It is the seat of the generative substance of the sexual energies and is symbolized by the *Yogi* as a triangle containing a tiny serpent coiled up in it. This sleeping serpent is called *Kundalini*, and to raise this *Kundalini* is the whole object of *Raja-Yoga*.

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"Lesson 4: Controlling the mind. The easiest way to get hold of the mind is to sit quiet and let it drift where it will for a while. Hold fast to the idea 'I am the witness, watching my mind drifting. The mind is not I.'

"Live alone as much as possible. Seat should be of comfortable height; put first a grass mat, then a skin, next a silken cover. It is better to have no back.

"We have to exclude all thought from the mind and make it blank: as fast as thought comes we have to banish it; to be able to accomplish this, we must transcend matter and go beyond our body.

"Lesson 5: *Pratyahara* and *Dharana*. *Pratyahara* is a gathering towards an attempt to get hold of the mind and focus it on the desired object.

"When the breath is flowing through the left nostril is the time for rest, through the right, for work, and through both is the time to meditate. When we are calm and breathing equally through both nostrils we are in the right condition for quiet meditation.

"Try to keep the imagination in *Yoga* (this is *Dharana*), being careful to keep it pure and holy. We all have our peculiarities in the way of imaginative power; follow the way most natural to you; it will be the easiest.

"Lesson 6: It is very useful to meditate on the *Sushumna*... .....It is a very fine, very brilliant thread, this living passage through the spinal cord, this way of salvation through which we have to make the *Kundalini* rise.

"In the Language of the *Yogi*, the *Sushumna* has its end in two lotuses, the lower, the lotus surrounding the triangle of the *Kundalini* and the top one in the brain surrounding the pineal gland; between these two are five other lotuses, stages on the way. 7th, Pineal Gland; 6th, Between the eyes; 5th, Bottom of the Throat; 4th, Level with the Heart; 3rd, Opposite the Navel; 2nd, Opposite the lower end of the alimentary canal; 1st, Base of Spine.

"We must awaken the *Kundalini*, then slowly raise it from one lotus to another till the brain is reached. Each stage corresponds to a new layer of the mind."

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28

A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

THE MAGNANIMOUS ideal of a Universal Religion was outlined by Vivekananda as early as 1893 on the floor of the Parliament of Religions. He boldly proclaimed *Advaita*, the unity of all existence, as the only possible basis of a Universal Religion. He recalled his Master's words, 'A river has no need of barriers. If it dams itself up it stagnates and becomes foul'. *Advaita* does not recognize any regional or racial or national boundaries. It accepts everything that exists, discards nothing, and transcends all petty squabbles. "The essential aspect of *Vedanta* is" says Vincent Shean, "its benign universalism, the welcome it gives to all who seek by whatever way. Curiosity and contradiction are not excluded. They are rather a necessary part of the meditative processes. Even hostility, which would seem to belong to the 'denying' elements, is not rejected, because it also elicits thought."[1]

Indeed no real religion can be anything short of a universal appeal. For one thing, if one stops considering personalities and sticks to principles, every religion would lead to universal love. "After all, what counts is not creed but conduct. By their fruits ye shall know them and not by their beliefs. Religion is not correct belief but righteous conduct."[2] Secondly, human nature

1. WVM. p. 7.
2. HVL. p. 51.

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being what it is, a constant call for breadth of outlook must be dinned in the ears of man; otherwise parochialism is always waiting round the corner. Those who profess love for humanity practise sectarian love and those who love their sects more than religion end by loving themselves more than their sects. With a deep insight into the human nature, seers like Buddha and Christ have avoided empty discussion and pinned down essential religion to giving up selfish desires and practising love for humanity. It is indeed surprising that sympathies of educated, well-meaning men are often narrow. Romain Rolland has noted with chagrin, "Over the door of Shantiniketan, the home of the Tagores, an inscription runs, 'In this place no image is to be adored.' But it goes to add, 'And no man's faith is to be despised'." This approach appears to stop at tolerance; but is short of acceptance. The *Advaitist* would respect even this attitude, and await its further broadening. Vivekananda relates an interesting experience in America which goes to show how miserably limited the circle of understanding of an average educated man is. "When I came to this country and was going through the Chicago Fair, a man from behind pulled at my turban. I looked back and saw that he was a very gentlemanly looking man, neatly dressed. I spoke to him, and when he found that I knew English, he became very much abashed. On another occasion in the same Fair another man gave me a push. When I asked him the reason, he also was ashamed and stammered out an apology saying, 'Why do you dress that way?' The sympathies of these men were limited within the range of their own language and their own fashion of dress."[3] The inner indifference for his uneducated brothers nourished by the average educated Indian is noticed by a casual observer. It is no doubt clothed in verbal sympathy in deference to democracy but the cover itself tells the observer that there is more in it than meets the eye.

Swami Vivekananda was eminently suited for the task of preaching the gospel of a Universal Religion. His profound love for humanity was simply boundless. It was reflected in the

3. *KY* p. 59.

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most casual of his actions Martha Brown Funke narrates an interesting incident. "Early the next morning loud splashings came from the bathroom, and mingling with them a deep voice chanting in an unknown tongue. I believe that a group of us huddled near the door to listen. At breakfast we asked him the meaning of the chant. He replied, 'I first put the water on my forehead, then on my breast, and each time I chant a prayer for blessings on all creatures.' This struck me forcibly. I was used to a morning prayer, but it was for myself that I prayed, and then for my family."[4] Josephine Macleod tells us, "He had a curious quality that when he was a *Bhakta*, a lover, he brushed aside *Karma* and *Raja* and *Jnana-Yogas* as if they were of no consequence whatever. And when he was a *Karma-Yogi*, then he made that the great theme. Or equally so, with the *Jnana-Yoga*."[5]

Vivekananda connected the diverse religions of diverse lands to different social customs prevailing in them. The needs of different souls are different depending on the individual inclination and circumstances. The difficulty arises when one demands that others think like himself. Vivekananda was convinced that no one rule can equally apply to people of this world in any field whatsoever. He adduced several instances bringing out the truth of his conviction to which lip-service is paid by many, but the awareness of which is in most of these only skin-deep. Vivekananda narrated how in the Himalayas he expressed disapproval of six husbands having one wife, to which one of the husbands replied, "You are a monk, and yet you preach this kind of selfishness to people !" Narrating another such instance he said, "The English do not like the sweet-smelling rice that we prefer so much. Once when a Judge of a certain place was transferred, the members of the bar sent all kinds of excellent food to him. Among these was a quantity of sweet-smelling rice..... When the Judge next met the lawyers, he said, 'You ought not to have given me rotten rice.'"[6]

Fanaticism in any matter is therefore a sure sign of narrow vision and is detrimental to the growth of healthy understand-

4. Rem. p. 145.
5. Rem. p. 241.
6. Rem p. 42.

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ing. In preaching his gospel of *Advaita* as a Universal Religion the main butt of Vivekananda's attack was misplaced religious enthusiasm. The idea of an exclusive religion for a family or a society or any other group kills the spirit of religion. Religion cannot be regimented. Two brothers may find diverse paths suited to their requirements; but that does not take away their brotherly love. Restrictions in religion invariably breed superstition. "How many beautiful spiritual truths have been nipped in the bud by this horrible idea of a family religion, a social religion, a national religion, and so forth !" exclaimed Vivekananda, "Think of what a mass of superstition is in your head justnow about your childhood's religion, or your country's religion, and what an amount of evil it does or can do!"[7]

A Universal Religion was a sacred passion with Vivekananda. With the awareness of universal unity, *Advaita*, as its kernel, it accommodates every well-meant effort of mankind to know truth, and encourages it. It does not glorify any particular sect, region or thought; it glorifies every sincere effusion irrespective of its source. In the last sitting of the Parliament of Religions on September 27, 1893, Vivekananda declared with prophetic fervour, "If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance: 'Help and not fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension'."[8]

7. LVR p. 244.
8. LEW p. 311.

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29

A TOWERING INTELLECTUAL

THE RANGE of Vivekananda's intellectual activity was vast indeed. In whichever assembly he was he happened to be the foremost intellectual present. His speech was a fair reflection of the stirring intellectual activity going on inside. I have not come across any statement of his intellectual quotient, but, had it been attempted it would have nearly broken the scales. During the modern renaissance in India quite a few intellectuals disposed towards unassuming scholarly pursuits drifted into public work due to exigencies of circumstances. Tilak used to say that if politics had not stolen him away, he would have been content with a quiet professorship of mathematics; Vivekananda's inclination towards calm, scholarly research was well-known. He often expressed a longing for the life of a recluse with books as his only treasure. Whenever he went to a retreat like Almora, this tendency became strong, and knowing it was not to be satisfied, he perhaps sought solace in expressing it. "I was born for the life of the scholar," said he at Almora in 1897, "retired, quiet, poring over my books. But the Mother dispenses otherwise. Yet the tendency is there."

There were several objective manifestations of his intellectual power. One of them was his unfailing and sharp memory. He had an excellent memory for faces. On his glorious return form the West, quite a few persons who knew him as an obscure

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monk were eager to congratulate him, and, perhaps to renew the old ties. He recognized each one of these former friends and described the former incidents minutely. He never forgot a face, he said. Whatever he once read he remembered all his life; and this applied to miscellaneous reading as well. Haripada Mitra relates, "One day, in the course of a talk, Swamiji quoted verbatim some two or three pages from *Pickwick Papers*. I wondered at this, not understanding how a *Sannyasin* could get by heart so much from a secular book. I thought that he must have read it quite a number of times before he took orders. When questioned he said, 'I read it twice—once when I was in school, and again some five or six months back.' 'Then how do you remember,' I asked in wonder, 'and why can we not remember thus?' 'One has to read with full attention,' he explained, 'and one must not fritter away the energy one draws from food.' " This brings us to his analysis of his gift. One can have a wonderful memory if one means to; one has to apply his whole mind un-reservedly to the subject he wants to remember.

Vivekananda was a champion of good memory. He never referred to books, and quoted references by the score without a slip of paper with him. Once in America, his reference to a point in Swedish history was challenged by a Swede, but Vivekananda calmly insisted that his reference was correct. The next day the Swede, having looked up the reference, conceded the point and apologized. Vivekananda expressed dissatisfaction with the poor memory of young boys; 'Of what use is the knowledge that is locked away in books?' he questioned. Yes, the chest of knowledge is the brain, and there it should be securely placed and not in cupboards. The Maharaja of Khetri was witness to another similar feat of his memory. Yet another similar occasion took place at Dr. Paul Deussen's at Kiel in Germany. "Some time during the day, the Professor found the Swami turning over the pages of a poetical work. He spoke to him but got no response. When the Swami came to know of it afterwards, he apologised, saying that he was so absorbed in reading that he had not heard him. The Professor was not satisfied with this explanation until in the course of conversation the Swami quoted and interpreted verses from the book. Dr. Deussen was dumbfounded, and asked the Swami how he could accomplish

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such a feat of memory. Thereupon the conversation turned upon the subject of the concentration of the mind as practised by the Indian *yogi*; and that with so much perfection that, the Swami said from personal knowledge, in that state he would be unconscious even if a piece of burning charcoal were placed on his body."[1]

With Vivekananda's remarkable memory goes hand in hand his power of fast reading already referred to. Early in life he had developed this faculty. During his convalescence at Meerut in 1891, he called for some books by Sir John Lubbock from a local library and returned them the next day saying he had read them. The librarian did not believe this, but on cross-examining the Swami regarding the contents of the books he was convinced that his assertion was true. Later similar instances occurred and this power came to be established as his normal practice. Analysing it he said, "It so happened that I could understand an author without reading his book line by line. I could get the meaning by just reading the first and the last line of a paragraph. As this power developed I found it unnecessary to read even the paragraphs. I could follow by reading only the first and last lines of a page. Further, where the author introduced discussion to explain a matter and it took him four or five or even more pages to clear the subject, I could grasp the whole trend of his arguments by only reading the first few lines." It appears that he could establish a link of communication of ideas with the author, a phenomenon which he claimed to be taking place slowly and imperceptibly. Just as by touching the hand of a person we can know the temperature of the whole body, he could comprehend the mental make-up of the author by reading a few lines.

Vivekananda's thirst for knowledge was insatiate. His vigilant eye was eager to fall upon everything and grasp its essence. At Los Angeles, he stayed with Miss Spencer, whose aged mother was blind and nearing the end. He often sat on the floor observing her. When Miss Spencer asked him what interested him so much in the old dying lady oblivious to all external circumstances, he replied that death and birth were

1. LEW, p. 427.

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both mysterious processes, and he was observing the dissociation of the senses preceding death. The dying lady meant to this death-probing scientist what a titration flask means to a student of chemistry!

Yet he thought his vast knowledge inadequate. "The man of genius," he writes with humility and possibly with a twinkle in his eye, "in any dress commands respect; but nobody cares for fools like me though carrying, like the washerman's ass, a a load of clothes on my back." He advocated fusion of foreign knowledge with the natural genius of India and opposed blind imitation. While collecting bits of knowledge like a bee collecting honey one should use discrimination, and like the swan in the Sanskrit verse drink milk and discard water. Such bits of information as examples of poor Indians dying during the famine beside their cattle rather than stretching forth a hand to kill were always quoted by him to advantage, and the hearers wondered at his extraordinary fund of information. His intellectual reaction to circumstances was quick and precise. See, for example, his cryptic comment on the life in America, within some days of arrival: "No country on earth has so many laws, and in no other they are so little regarded. On the whole our poor Hindu people are infinitely more moral than any of the Westerners. In religion they practise here either hypocrisy or fanaticism. Sober-minded men have become disgusted with their superstitious religion and are looking forward to India for new light." His characteristic thinking process comprised a rare capacity to contain vast images and a leap to the universal from the particular. His initial observations on American life are typical of these traits. "The average American woman is far more cultivated", he writes on November 2, 1893, "than the average American man.....Asia laid the germs of civilization, Europe developed man, and America is developing woman and the masses." His prophetic utterances, of which quite a few are well-known and all have come true, are keen perceptions of circumstances around him. Sister Christine records how "he startled us by saying, 'The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China.' To the ordinary thinker those two countries seemed the most unlikely nations in the world to usher in a new era."

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To us in India, this was possibly the first of those warnings for not heeding which we are paying through the nose today. He almost predicted the first World War when he said, "Europe is on the edge of a volcano. Unless the fires are extinguished by a flood of spirituality, it will blow up," Christine who lived through this blowing up writes in amazement in 1949, "This of Europe in 1895, when it was prosperous and at peace. Twenty years later came the explosion." She also tells us how he predicted the communist rule in Russia by saying that the priestly caste, the warriors, the commercial caste and the labourer were to gain assendancy one after the other and the time had come for the last epoch to begin. "With him", remarks Christine, "it was never an expression of opinion, beginning with 'I think', but an authoritative statement."[2] At Varanasi in 1890 he told Pramada Das Dasgupta while taking leave that when he would come again there he would burst like a bombshell, and the society would follow him like a dog! This declaration smacking of irresponsible vanity in the mouth of a mere youth, however clever, became true, for in his next visit to Varanasi he was to receive a tremendous public ovation. Romain Rolland comments on this faculty of Vivekananda, "The co-existence in one and the same brain in this our twentieth century of scientific reason and the visionary spirit of ancient times, that is what our wise men cannot imagine; they are no longer mad enough!" This madness consists in perfect purity and complete concentration of the mind.

It was an essentially intellectual approach which Vivekananda displayed in all his convictions, not excepting his devotion to Ramakrishna. 'Ramakrishna lies very near to my heart,' he used to say, 'because I see in him a man and not an incarnation as he appears to his disciples.'[3] His faith in his teacher was thus an intellectual concept; he had experienced the power of that faith, and gave it a readily comprehensible verbal form. His devotion was not parochial; he saw God, the universal teacher, reflected in his teacher. When he was drawn to Pavhari Baba, the great Saint of Gazipur, some of his associates smelled a

2. Rem. p. 204.
3. LVR p. 1.

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sort of defection from Ramakrishna. He writes in a letter, "My motto is to learn whatever good things I may come across anywhere. This leads my friends to think that it will take away from my devotion to the *Guru.* These ideas I count as those of lunatics and bigots. For all *Gurus* are one, and are fragments and radiations of God, the universal *Guru.*"[4] Faith is considered to begin where intellect ends. A keen intellect would make faith reconcile with it rather than divorce it. A major test of intellectual intensity would therefore be its running hand-in-hand with faith. Vivekananda's devotion to his teacher passed this test; it was the culmination of a thinking process of great intensity; it sprang out of deep intellectual conviction.

Vivekananda was a fearless thinker. It was his conviction that nothing is completely right and nothing completely wrong. This conviction was by no means new, for the good old *Gita* says that every work is fraught with faults as fire is inevitably wrapped in smoke.[5] Vivekananda however did not confine this principle to the portals of philosophy; he thought in conformity with it. He did not stop at that either; he placed faults in the proper perspective. Faults in a man stem through the same essential nature of that man from which his virtues also arise. If you disturb that nature you would snap the sap of virtues also. You have to temper faults and transform them into virtues. "Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," says Hamlet. Vivekananda emphasised that circumstances make vices of virtues and virtues of vices. "Never forget that a man is made great and perfect", he said, "as much by his faults as by his virtues. So we must not seek to rob a nation of its character, even if it could be proved that character was all faults." Very often our dislike of shortcomings is limited to those of others; one's faults one does not hate, or deride, one tries to belittle them, at best to remove them. Only a little dispassionate study of one's treatment to one's own faults would bear this out. A thorn on the tree can be broken readily; a thorn in the flesh cannot be so broken, it has to be soothed gently and removed.

4. *Let.* p. 35.
5. *Ch.* III.

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The norm of Vivekananda's thinking process was thus a search for balance, a practicable, fruitful adjustment. It was due to this approach that he was at times thought inconsistent. But as Emerson says, 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.' Vivekananda never bothered about it. What was more important, he trained his disciples into his way of thinking. The account by Christine of such training makes an interesting and suggestive reading. "It often seemed to us that Swami Vivekananda was not consistent," writes Christine, "For days together he would inveigh passionately against child-marriage, caste, etc.; until he made us believe that there was no other point of view. Then quite suddenly, perhaps in answer to a facile acceptance of all that he had said, he would turn and rend those who agreed with him, . . . and prove conclusively that the opposite was true. 'But Swamiji', someone said in distress, 'You said just the opposite yesterday.' 'Yes, that was yesterday, 'he would reply, if at all . . . We came to know long afterwards that after weighing the pros and cons, he came to a conclusion. This did not mean that he thought that one side was altogether right and the other altogether wrong, but rather that the balance was slightly in favour of the one, and probably only so because of the needs of the time. Having come to this decision, he no longer discussed the matter but thought of some way to put his conclusions into practice."[6] It was this marvellous method that gave his thought its extensive breadth and balance and saved him from drab inaction which often results as the dampening corollary of a standpoint trying to see the good in opposite entities; indeed it was instrumental in accomplishing considerable work within a short period.

6. Rem. p. 228.

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30

AN APOSTLE OF STRENGTH

THE ESSENTIAL nature of Swami Vivekananda's life-work may very well be condensed by describing him as an apostle of strength. Verily the sage of the *Katha Upanishad* was reborn to revitalize the message 'Inculcate strength (बलमुपास्व ।).' His countrymen were in the most distressed condition oppressed by sullen sluggishness along with the foreign power, feeble in body and mind, insipid and glum in thought and action, and damned and dampened in prosperity and cheer. Hope lost is everything lost. Hope is the most useful and valid form of strength to those attempting a phenomenal rise. Hope is not so much removed from reality either, for human potentialities are never fully tapped and their fund is apparently inexhaustible. Faith in oneself and optimism are the stimulating agents of this dormant strength. The emphasis on strength which was the main burden of Vivekananda's advice to his fellowmen thus was a multidimensional measure. On the psychological plane it played the part played by the doctor by injecting courage into the patient. It was instrumental in surcharging the atmosphere with a strong current of self-confidence. Further, it revived study of the ancient treasures of wisdom, a concrete result; and the most important outcome was the unleashing of the tremendous sense of unity inspired by the awareness of a common spiritual heritage.

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Strength meant nothing to Vivekananda without physical sturdiness. Time and again this '*Pehlwan Swami*' told people, especially students, to take exercise and to play outdoor games. "Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you," he told the youth of the country, "You will be nearer to heaven through football, than through the study of the *Gita*, you will understand *Gita* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger." He detested glib speculations infesting the country about somebody being an incarnation of God and someone else being not one. To a youth in Dacca, wasting time in such vain gossip, he told, "My boy, take my advice; develop your muscles and your brain by eating good food and by healthy exercise, and then you will be able to think for yourself. Without nourishing food your brain seems to be a little weak." Physical weakness is the cause of at least one third of our miseries, he used to say. With a little strong blood in oneself one understands things well and carries oneself upright. To the question asked by a close friend, "Is it any particular creed you mean by religion ?" he replied, "The essence of my religion is strength. The religion that does not infuse strength into the heart is no religion to me, be it of the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* or the *Bhagawata*." The *Upanishads* indeed were the first to say categorically, "This soul is unattainable by the weak." From the hoary sages to Kalidasa the cry has all along been "Preserve your body in efficient condition for the body is the foremost instrument of religion."[1] Of late religion had come to be identified with devotion, *bhakti*, which, if pracitised exclusively by all men, would weaken the society; in preaching the gospel of strength Vivekananda took up cudgels against this tendency, which he called sentimental nonsense. Strength must be essentially that of character with strong physique to support and sustain it. "Truth is infinitely more weighty than untruth; so is goodness. If you possess these, they will make their way by sheer gravity."

But if it comes to comparison between impious strength and pious weakness, Vivekananda places the former higher. "I have respect even for a wicked person," he says, "So long as he is

1. III/iv/4.

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manly and strong, for his strength will make him some day give up his wickedness and even renounce all work for selfish ends, and will thus eventually bring him to the truth." Physical strength and manly courage are the basic edifice. Even if the upper tower is a filthy structure of evil, the value of the lower edifice does not diminish. The upper tower can be demolished and replaced or altered to design. But if the lower edifice is absent you have to build from the scratches, and that means more work, perhaps hopeless. Here Vivekananda seems to have as examples before him the lives of men like Valmiki and Tulsidas, who were brutes till a decisive turning point transformed their lives. If the ability exists it can be directed as desired, but it is almost impossible to thrust it from outside; it must come from inside by one's own efforts. Vivekananda's favourite comparison between a cow and a man hits the nail on the head here. A cow has no capacity for sin, but nobody would rate it higher than a man, however evil he may be. And in the hour of glum helplessness that the nation was at the time, it was of overwhelming importance to stress the need of strength, of self-confidence.

Vivekananda pinned down the ills of India to the lack of self-confidence. Being strong was with him bubbling with immense faith in one's powers, one's potentialities. The Samson of India had lost his hair of self-confidence; restoration of that hair was most urgent. Hindus were customarily associated with faith; they were accused of blind faith; of standing before God with dull faces, folded hands, and eyes meekly shut, of believing in any scare raised by anyone anywhere. This was the faith of the 'yours faithfully,' of dogs. This was not the faith which was sought to be rejuvenated by Vivekananda. Lest he be misunderstood and misinterpreted by punsters and others, he perhaps clarifies the point. "We have lost faith," he says, "We have less faith than the Englishmen and women, a thousand times less faith ! why is it that we, three hundred and thirty millions of people have been ruled for the last one thousand years by any and every handful of foreigners who chose to walk over our prostrate bodies? Because they had faith in themselves and we had not." Indeed nobody could more effectively preach the gospel of self-confidence than one who had won some battles in

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the West with that one weapon. Vivekananda's confidence in the blessedness of his work, in the correctness of his approach and in the paramount need of broadcasting Hinduism was absolutely unimpeachable. It was not a joke to wash the dirty linen of the West to the face of the West, and that of India to the face of Indians. The main capital which not only made a success of this job, but paid rich dividends, was his bold belief in the bonafides of his task. Even in his earliest lectures in America his cool courage of conviction was evident. The account of one of these lectures reads, "A striking illustration of what in another case would be termed insularity of outlook was brought to view by a noted Hindu when addressing a vast audience at the World Congress of Religions in America, in 1893. Pausing in the midst of his discourse the speaker asked that every member of the audience who had read the sacred books of the Hindus, and who therefore had first-hand knowledge of their religion, would raise his hand. Only three or four hands were raised, though the audience represented, presumably, the leading theologians of many lands. Glancing benignly over the assembly, the Hindu raised himself to his full height, and in a voice every accent of which must have smitten the audience as a rebuke, pronounced these simple words, 'And yet you dare to judge us.' "[2] A verbal whip graphically struck, with a prior warning; but a well-meant one and therefore owned with assent! Innumerable such whips were in store for his countrymen. It was his immense self-confidence that transformed these apparently 'insular outbursts' into well-deserved and accepted chastisements.

And his courage was not limited to mental activity either. His physical courage was only equal to his strength of conviction. Some instances of his fearless meeting with death have been mentioned; therein he craved for death but death did not choose to descend on him. Sister Nivedita relates two incidents which show his bold behaviour in the face of death attacking without notice. "Once as he was walking with Miss Muller and an English friend across some fields (in England), a mad bull came tearing towards them.....the Englishman frankly ran,

2. LEW p. 314.

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and reached the other side of the hill in safety. The woman ran as far as she could, and then sank to the ground, incapable of further effort. Seeing this, and unable to aid her, the Swami—thinking 'so this is the end, after all'—took up his stand in front of her, with folded arms. He told afterwards how his mind was occupied with a mathematical calculation as to how far the bull would be able to throw him. But the animal suddenly stopped, a few paces off, and then raising his head, returned silently..... A like courage—though he himself was far from thinking of these incidents—had shown itself, in his early youth, when he quietly stepped up to a runaway horse, and caught it, in the streets of Calcutta, thus saving the life of the woman, who occupied the carriage behind." It is thus significant that Vivekananda's gospel of strength drew sap from his life; his credentials were writ large on his face and were stamped on every pace he strode. His life constituted his sermon, his words were only its reflection.

Strength of an individual is valuable enough; it becomes meaningful and crucial in the social context only. The Social significance of an individual's strength depends on the power and inclination to give away. A man is really strong when he is physically sturdy and mentally courageous and optimistic and is able to relieve his neighbours of their hardship. His strength must be socially fruitful. It was particularly necessary to din this aspect of strength in the ears of Indians because they were and are used to sermonizing to and exploiting others. Ridden with narrow considerations of caste and creed and social superiority, they want freedom to enslave the poor, the uneducated. Unless a man is free from such inhibitions, and ready to make his resources socially meaningful, he is not strong. "None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty" says Vivekananda, "Suppose that the English give over to you all the power. Why, the powers that be then, will hold the people down, and let them not have it. Slaves want power to make slaves." Here is a red signal for free India, and especially for the powerful therein. Inspite of our formal democracy and verbal faith in a socialistic pattern, a strong will to share with others is still eluding us; we have yet to develop the strength to give away. Natural powers like electricity are dynamic, they

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change hands constantly, they spread in every available area; our political, economic and spiritual powers must also be diffused similarly to become socially meaningful; and legislation is less pertinent here than the inherent strong will to give away.

The way to develop physical and mental strength is ceaseless effort, constant *Tapasya*. At every step you have to fight against nature. Take the simple case of regular exercise. You leave your bed early for two days and take exercise, and on the third day nature coaxes you into slumber. Constant vigilance is the price of strength. Nature will try to win back every fortress you occupy, care must be taken to defend that, and the most effective form of defence is attack. Nature will try to loosen every muscle you build up; build up new ones and thwart nature's plans. Being strong is fighting against the so-called natural urges. Giving away is swimming against the current of the natural urge of self-preservation and family preservation. Vivekananda visualised this as the only process of being strong, and hence the slogan of 'harmony with nature', came in for emphatic ridicule at his hands. "Trees live in harmony with nature", he said, "perfect harmony there; no opposition and no progress. We are to resist nature at every point if we are to make any progress."

In this war against nature, every battle is crucial; every moment is a prestige moment. The slogan of modern war, viz., 'We may lose battles, but we shall win the war' is all right for injecting hope in the losing side; it is a bad business proposition. To win battles decisively should be the aim, and the war will be won automatically. In the final squaring of accounts, the winning side will generally emerge as the winner of the greater number of battles, and certainly of the decisive battles. A hero is really strong, when he is hero to his valet also. A strong man must be equal to small occasions as well as great. Life is filled to the tip of the little finger, to the core of every cell; strength must exhibit itself through every little moment, through every trifle. "Every fool may become a hero at one time or another," warns Vivekananda, "Great occasions rouse even the lowest of human beings to some kind of greatness, but he alone is great whose character is great always, the same wherever he be."

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Finally, the most significant feature of Vivekananda's gospel of strength: it does not make a fetish of non-violence. The *viveka* which adorns his name is evident in his exposition of this doctrine as of others. It is a bitter irony of history that in the land of the *Gita* which does not mince words in asking mankind to fight evil, to kill evil-doers, confusion rages under the sweet name of *ahimsa* in the minds of some students of the very same *Gita*. A snake must be killed by one in whom hunger begets anger. Only that man who is above hunger and thirst, in other words who is a *Yogi*, has the right, has the strength to excuse a snake, to practise non-violence. An ordinary man running away from a snake is not non-violent, he is feeble, weak. Vivekananda does not make non-violence a dead doctrine; he conceives it as a dynamic concept adjustible like everything else in this *maya*. He expressly enjoins, "To his enemies the householder must be a hero. Them he must resist." This theme recurrs again and again in his speeches and writings. He used to say that *Vedanta* may be professed by a coward, but it could be put into practice only by the most stouthearted. It was strong meat for weak stomachs.

Vivekananda has no fond liking for non-violence for its own sake; it is an incidental item of conduct issuing out of a man's spiritual status; it cannot be imposed on any one in isolation. A strong man who maintains a family, and participates with a healthy taste in all enjoyments, will resist oppression, and he should end oppression; if he does not do so, he fails in his duty. Talk of non-resistance in his mouth would be perversion, sheer mockery. When asked, "What should we do when we see the strong oppress the weak?" Vivekananda replied, "Thrash the strong, of course!" On another occasion he was asked, "Ought one to seek an opportunity of death in defence of right, or ought one never to react?" He replied, "I am for no reaction for *Sannyasins*; self-defence for the householder." And strong deterrent offensive for the soldier, the *Kshatriya*, the Government, he might have added had the questioner asked. He thus never conceived non-resistance as a mode of conduct for the masses. Resistance of the enemy with all the might at one's command was his prescription for the masses, and, it follows, for nations and governments, which rise from the masses.

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In the right tradition of Hinduism, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, he advocated cultivation of power and use of it against the enemy unreservedly and for success. Even spiritually speaking, this resistance is the only effective way of stopping evil from spreading, and ultimately, it results in lesser violence than the so called non-violence practised without discrimination.

It was a sad day for India when non-resistance to the enemy was advocated as a mass-ideal. If we are still labouring under this ill-conceived extension of non-resistance, let Vivekananda remind us that the duty of the *Kshatriyas*, the Government, is to grow strong and defeat the enemy. Let him remind us that we are most of us mosquitoes and must struggle hard to throw back and escape from the DDT spray. Let this gospel of strength preached by the *Upanishads* and revived by Vivekananda be the guiding star of our national policies.

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ON RELIGION AND RELIGIONS

UNDER THIS title we shall attempt a brief survey of Vivekananda's ideas on the fundamental principles of religion and his remarks on various aspects of different religious systems like Buddhism and Christianity. To begin with, the underlying presence of some sort of a support, some unvisible spring of consolation, courage and inspiration is felt by every human being. It may be an image, a prayer, a picture or an idea. In times of tremulation man turns, sometimes secretly, to this inner spring. Ordinarily, a loving friend cheers us in calamity. In harder trials, friends seem to fail, being as helpless as ourselves, and despondent refuge is sought in this inner spring; when confirmed, it generally gets transformed into steadfast belief. The Lord's image to the devotee, man's inherent belief in ideas like '*Satyameva jayate*' 'Justice triumphs finally', the ideal of communism to the communist, are but different springs functioning to the same end. A man not having such an inner centre secretly informing all his thoughts and actions is hard to imagine; he would be in a void, in something far more serious than lunacy. This central force is called religion by Vivekananda, and that is why, he defines an atheist, not as 'one not believing in God', but as 'one not believing in himself.' This central force is essentially not open to reasoned argument; the truth of '*Satyameva jayate*' cannot be demonstrated; even that of the

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belief that 'communism is the salvation of the world' cannot be demonstrated due to the complexity of the material involved, and due also to the impossibility of an all-acceptable premise for argument. But these belifes man entertains even against numerous instances to the contrary. It is necessary to purify this religious basis of man's life in conformity with the doctrine of *Advaita*, and to intensify the awareness of religion in the human mind.

In any transitional period, it is all the more necessary to hold fast to this fulcrum of religion, lest balance may be lost for good. Vivekananda emphasized this when he said, "Every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas."

The spiritual teacher teaches through the medium of his life; lecturing he may do a little, conversing a trifle more, but it is his actual way of life that mainly participates in the teaching. Vivekananda referred to spiritual instruction as man-making, through a life-to-life contact the life of the pupil is moulded. He admired Thomas a Kempis just for the account of the author's monastery and its organisation. "If only they had told what Jesus ate and drank, where he lived and slept, and how he passed the day, instead of all rushing to put down what he said. 'Those long lectures.' Why, all that can be said on religion can be counted on a few fingers. That does not matter; it is the man that grows out of it.....Salvation is nothing in itself, it is only a motive. All those things are nothing, except as motives. It is the man they form, that is everything." When the question of writing the life of Ramakrishna cropped up, Vivekananda said, "It was not the words of Shri Ramakrishna but the life that he lived that was wanted, and that is yet to be written. After all, this world is a series of pictures, and man-making is the great interest running through. We were all watching the making of men, and that alone."[1] Ramakrishna considered man-making his mission and that is why he was always weeding out and rejecting the old, he always chose the young for his disciples.

1. Rem. p. 276.

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The greatest spiritual men however do not even teach in a formal way. They do not accept disciples, no contact on personal basis can be tolerated by them, merged in the Infinite as they are. They are identified with the motive power of the world, and are much more than that. They are not identifiable and remain unknown to us. Fame is generally inversely proportionate to the spiritual status of these giants. The greater their spiritual attainments, the less they are generally known. Further, even if we know them, we have no instrument to gauge their greatness. An ant can see a bigger ant, it cannot perceive the great elephant; the elephant just does not exist for the ant. "The greatest men in the world have passed away unknown." Says Vivekananda, "The Buddhas and the Christs that we know are but second-rate heroes."

It is obvious therefore that religion has nothing to do with petty material prizes. Asking religion to deliver the material goods will be as childish as the baby's asking the mathematics teacher, "How many lollipops will the study of mathematics give me?" Yet sometimes the teacher of mathematics gives the baby lollipops, and the baby thinks she got them because she exerted herself with a correct multiplication. This is the case of persons who pray to God for better material conditions and sometimes get them. As a spiritual pupil ascends some steps of progress, he comprehends the base lack of logic in connecting religion with material prosperity. Even the most unselfish material ends are simply irrelevant where pure religion is concerned. A conversation of Ramakrishna with Naren is here instructive. A learned scholar once requested the master to get rid of his disease by will-power, for he believed he could do it. "You are a scholar," replied the Master, "and yet you make such a senseless proposal. I have given my mind once for all to God. How is it possible for me to take it away and concentrate it upon this cage of rotten flesh and blood?" After the pandit left, the disciples led by Naren persisted with the same request saying that at least for their sake he should heal himself using *Yogic* powers. Ramakrishna replied, "Do you think I undergo this suffering voluntarily? I would like to see it cured. But it is still there. Everything depends on the sweet will of the mother." Naren requested him to pray to the mother

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who would never let Ramakrishna down. Finally Ramakrishna agreed to do their bidding, and, having prayed to the Mother, reported. "I said to her pointing to my throat, 'I cannot eat anything on account of a sore here. Please see that I may eat a little.' The Mother replied, pointing to you all, 'Why! Are you not eating through so many mouths?' I was so ashamed that I could not utter another word."

These are a few of the broad general principles of religion brought out in his lectures by Vivekananda. Now to pass on to some of his observations on the peculiarities of the various religions.

Hindus are the only people who do not care for propagating their creed. Religion is of paramount importance to them and not the stamp Hindu. Contrast a great Hindu teacher like Vivekananda himself preaching in alien lands and getting an immense following, but not caring to change the label of a single follower with the so-called Christian missionary bands shaming army recruiting officers, and the best anglers, in baiting men and women. A greater perversity and defilement of a sacred institution cannot be imagined. Every missionary adopting dubious tactics to convert men and women of an alien faith is perpetually crucifying Christ. Vivekananda warned the country against these weakening activities, and it is high time we in India and the government representing us took steps to counter this mockery of religion in India. This is necessary because these dubious activities weaken the national fibre, and ultimately hamper the progress of the nation towards noble ideals.

Vivekananda was the disciple of that magnanimous master who frequently warned his disciples against any kind of Ramakrishnaism. No new sect was necessary in the world, he said, which was already too full of sects. The exquisite tendency of self-effacement was dominant in the Master and the disciple, who were both worthy children of the broad Hindu tradition. "Do not let me become famous by leading those who believe in beliefs to me. Do not expound beliefs through my voice," prayed Ramakrishna to the Mother. 'Religion is a path', said Vivekananda, 'which leads to God, but a path is not a house.'

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To be proud of the path instead of the house would be a sad case of perverse priorities.

Of course paths can compete with each other as paths; though no path can claim to be the goal. A sort of healthy competition between different paths can go on, and every path has to accept the credentials of all others. This is the crux of Hinduism which is applicable every-where and it is therefore a non-sectarian sect, non-sectarian with reference to its broad acceptance of every healthy religious activity in the world and sect with respect to its region of origin and flourishing. "For a religion to be effective," says Vivekananda, "enthusiasm is necessary. At the same time we must try to avoid the danger of multiplying creeds. We avoid that by being a non-sectarian sect, having all the advantages of a sect and the broadness of a universal religion."[2] As a sect Hinduism is conditioned by the mountains and rivers of the land of its birth, the social customs of its people, by the various rituals like image-worship; it represents a development of religion along regional lines, a ray of light passing through the Indian prism.

Among the followers of Vivekananda there were some who formally accepted Hinduism. Nivedita, Kripananda, Atulananda, Viraja Devi, Abhayananda were some of the most eminent of them. In the case of these, he performed formal ceremonies marking their renouncing their formal sect and embracing Hinduism. They imbibed the Hindu way of life along with the Hindu view of life, and made India their home, service to India their life-mission. There were also some examples of return to the Hindu fold of former converts. Discussing the genesis of his conversion, Atulananda says, "The answer in my case is really very simple. I did not renounce Christianity for the simple reason that I was never a Christian. Though born in a Christian family, I never accepted Christianity as my religion. I did not accept religion in any form until I came in contact with Eastern thought."[3] This statement coupled with another by the same gentleman beautifully illustrates the nature of Hinduism described by Vivekananda in that succinct phrase 'non-sectatian sect.'

2. Complete works IV 302.
3. WVM. p. 87.

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"A missionary had noticed me," says Atulananda, "and at last he entered my compartment. Then he asked me why I had forsaken Jesus. I told him, 'Sir, seeing that I have adopted the Hindu religion, you take it for granted that I do not honour Christ. But you are greatly mistaken....Through Swami Vivekananda I have learned to regard Him as one of the incarnations of God."[4]

Another significant feature of Hinduism which Vivekananda expounded was symbolism. Hinduism, as a sect, may be condensed in one word—'Symbolism'. The Hindu worships the image, reveres the cow, sees God in the Ganga and Narmada; in the morning the first thing an orthodox Hindu does is to gaze intently at his palm, muttering,

> The Goddess of wealth resides in the tips of finger :
> The Goddess of learning in the mid-palm;
> Lord Govinda at the root of the palm,
> So gaze at the palm at dawn.
> While taking his bath he recites,
> O Ganga and O Yamuna, O Godavari and
> O Sarasvati, O Narmada, O Sindhu and O Kaveri,
> Conglomerate in this bath-water.

Undoubtedly he comprehends the symbolism in all this; his life is densely populated by symbols. This vast symbolic populace culminates in life itself having only a symbolic reality.

One suspects however that this symbolism is tending towards fad. Symbols have artificial value, and are means to the end. In any society symbols are bound to exist not only in religion but also in secular life, but those in religion run the risk of being given too much emphasis, for they derive their validity from subjective criteria, while those in secular life do not run that risk because their validity is derived from objective criteria. The rigid fads surrounding worship of images at religious centres often smack of irrational, blind manoeuvre and should

4. WVM p. 89.

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be divorced from religion and discarded. It is devotion of which the Lord is fond, and a symbol is but a medium, and must always remain an imperfect medium, of expressing that devotion. Treating the symbol as an end in itself as many lay devotees are inclined to do is as useless and dangerous as putting the cart before the horse. It is to warn these over-enthusiasts that Vivekananda said, "You may always say that the image is God. The error you have to avoid is to think God the image." Nonetheless he strongly defended pure symbolism as a valid part of religion. When he was called upon to condemn the fetishism of the Hottentot who, it was told, alternately worshipped, beat and thanked the object of worship, he asserted, "I do that!" A devotee becoming intimate with an image through which he worships God may very well get angry with it for not blessing him and may beat it, and thank it when he gets emotional satisfaction. It is just as a child treats its mother. "Don't you see that there is no fetishism?" asked Vivekananda. "Oh, your hearts are steeled, that you cannot see that the child sees persons everywhere. Knowledge robs us of the child's vision, but at last, through higher knowledge, we win back to it. He connects a living power with rocks, sticks, trees and the rest. And is there not a living power behind? It is symbolism, not fetishism. Can you not see?"[5]

Vivekananda was a keen student of comparative religion. He minutely studied religious ritual and drew his own original conclusions. He pointed out the similarity between the Hindu and the Roman Catholic ritual, the offering of food to God and *prasada* in the former corresponding to the mass and blessed sacrament in the latter. He credited Mohamedanism with complete destruction of priesthood and remarked that Protestantism borrowed it from that Mohamedans probably under Moorish influence. Later Protestantism remained steadfast in its rejection of the priest; among Mohamedans however the class of Mullas and Maulavis made headway parallel to similar classes among the Hindus and the Christians. Tonsure, institutions of monks and nuns were common to Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, Vivekananda pointed out. Animal sacrifice which was

5. LEW, p. 658.

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in vogue in primitive religions was systematized by the *Vedic* Aryans in the form of the institution of *Yajtena*, and this continues till the present day in a skeleton form. Kali, the favourite goddess of Bengal is the goddess of destruction, and demands animal offerings. Vivekananda and Nivedita have attempted to find a rationale of animal killing as a ritual. Nivedita gave a few talks in Calcutta on Kali worship in which she idealized the ritual of animal killing. "I have found out the culminating point of sacrifice, and wonder if I could express it," says Nivedita, "It seems that the sacrifice of animals only goes on till the devotee is strong enough to offer himself instead, and then, like the Pelican he draws his own blood, and buries the feet of the Mother in flowers dipped in it. To me it explains and justifies the whole."[6] This idealization may seem unwarranted to many. It seems such to me. Man imagines that his God likes what he likes, and offers that and rich foods to Him. Animal offering was in vogue generally in flesh-eating castes in India. Traditionally non-flesh-eaters offer their Gods only vegetable and milk-food. This appears to be the simple rationale of all offerings to God which have been moulded by priests into intricate systems supported by legends.

Vivekananda's superb research talents were called forth on many an occasion. In his Paris lectures, he strongly refuted the view that the ritual of *Siva-linga* worship represented phallicism. Drawing his proofs from the *Vedas*, especially the *Atharva-Veda*, and the Buddhistic literature and architecture, he gave a learned discourse which ended to the tune of remarks from several scholars present to the effect that modern Sanskrit scholarship in Europe was broadly in agreement with his views. In a nutshell, Vivekananda traced the origin of the *Siva-linga* to the *Yupa-stambha*, the sacrificial post, idealised in *Vedic* ritual as the symbol of *Brahman*. "As afterwards, the sacrificial fire, its smoke, ashes and flames, the *Soma* plant, and the bull that used to carry on its back the wood for the *Vedic* sacrifice, gave place to the conceptions of the brightness of Siva's body, his tawny matted hair, his blue throat and his riding on the bull, and so on; just so the *Yupa-Stambha* gave place to the *Siva-linga*

6. Rem. p. 272.

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and was deified as the essential nature, the symbol (*linga*) of Siva." The Buddhist *Stupas*, which probably were designed after the *Yupa-stambha*, reinforced the vogue of the *Siva-linga* as a parallel development in *Vedic* religion. "It was quite probable that during the Buddhistic ascendancy the Hindu adopted this custom (the *stupa*) and used to erect memorials resembling their *Stambha*. The *Salagrama-Silas* were natural stones resembling the artificially—cut stones of the *Dhatu garbha*, or metal-wombed stone-relic cases of the Buddhist *stupas*, and thus being first worshipped by the Buddhists gradually were adopted into Vaishnavism. The explanation of the *Salagrama-Sila* as a phallic emblem was an imaginary invention. It had been a degenerate period in India following the downfall of Buddhism which had brought on the association of sex with the *siva-linga*. In reality, the *Siva-linga* and the *Salagrama-Sila* had no more to do with sex-worship than the Holy communion in Christianity had in common with cannibalism."[7]

The famous doctrine of rebirth is a signficant contribution of Hinduism to world religious thought. Modern researches have tended to adduce evidence in favour of the doctrine, and the logic of the doctrine has found advocates in the West. The belief in re-incarnation is deep-rooted in the Hindu blood. Vivekananda touched this doctrine from two ends; he expounded it with a searching and penetrating logic, and what is more interesting, he avowed his personal knowledge of his former births. Here we shall confine our narrative to the latter. He says, "From my very boyhood whenever I came in contact with a particular object, man or place, it would sometimes appear to me as if I had been acquainted with it beforehand . . . One day I was discussing various topics with my friends at a particular place. Suddenly something was said, which at once reminded me that in some time past in this very house I had talked with these friends on that very subject and that the discussion had even taken the same turn . . . Now I believe that before I was born I must have had visions somehow of those subjects and people with whom I would have to come in contact in my present birth. That memory comes every now and then, before

7. LEW p. 684.

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me, throughout my whole life."[8] On numerous occasions to the question 'Do you remember your past life ?' he replied without a moment's hesitation, 'Yes, clearly even when I was a littlt boy.'[9] The inherent belief in rebirth was often used to advantage by him. Giving an account of his conversation with Robert Ingersoll, the famous American thinker, he said, "Ingersoll once said to me, 'I believe in making the most out of this world, in squeezing the orange dry, becasue this world is all I am sure of.' I replied, 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do, and I get more out of it. I know I cannot die, so I am not in a hurry. I know that there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property and so I can love all men and women. Everyone is a God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God. Squeeze your orange this way, get ten thousand fold more out of it. Get every single drop.' "[10]

Words would fail to do justice to Vivekananda's veneration for spiritual giants like Krishna, Buddha, Suka, Christ. He dwelt in the hearts of these leaders of humanity, understood them so well, and vividly re-created them when his mood demanded it. When he brooded over one of these heroes, he was oblivious to everything else. Of Buddha and Buddhism he had made a penetrating study. "Lord Buddha is my *Ishtam*—my God," he wrote in a letter, "He preached no theory about Godhead, he was himself God, I fully believe it." Even in his student life he dilated for hours on Buddha often in the presence of Ramakrishna. The towering intellect of the Enlightened One (Buddha), the eminent sanity of his views, his uncompromising demand for Truth, his burning renunciation, his compassionate heart, his sweet, deep, luminous personality, his sublime morality and the manner in which he struck the balance between metaphysics and human behaviour appealed to him tremendously. On one occasion, when he was expatiating on Buddha, a lady exclaimed, 'Why, Swami, I did not know that you were a Buddhist.' 'Madam,' he said rounding on her, his whole face

8. LEW p. 21.
9. LEW p. 675.
10. LEW p. 327.

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aglow with the inspiration of that name, 'I am the servant of the servants of Buddha. Who was there ever like Him? The Lord, who never performed one action for Himself, with a heart that embraced the whole world! So full of pity that he would give His life to save a little goat! So loving that he sacrificed Himself to the hunger of a tigress, to the hospitality of a pariah and blessed him! And He came into my room when I was a boy and I fell at His feet.'[11]

With all his veneration for Buddha, he believed that Buddhism was incomplete, that Hinduism and Buddhism were complementary to each other. Hinduism later absorbed Buddhism, and so it represents a historical process. Buddha had received his philosophy of the five categories—form, feeling, sensation, motion, knowledge, from the ancient Kapila. But Buddha had brought love that made the philosophy live. 'But the great mistake committed by Buddhism lay in the destruction of the old.' Two-sided movements characterised the sway of Buddhism in India. "On the religious side, it represented freedom from ceremonial; on the political side, overthrow of the priesthood by the *Kshatriyas*." Buddha, he claimed, was a living emblem of *Advaita*, his universal love and the doctrine of giving up *trishna* (greed) are offshoots of *Advaita*. Thus, he said, 'The *Advaita* has twice saved India from materialism. By the coming of Buddha, who appeared in a time of most hideous and widespread materialism . . . By the coming of Sankara, who when materialism had reconquered India in the form of the demoralisation of the governing classes and of superstition in the lower classes, put fresh life into *Vedanta*, by making a rational philosophy emerge out of it. Comparing Buddha and Sankara he arrives at a wonderful synthesis. For Sankara too had his limits. He had not the slightest bit of Buddha's wonderful heart; dry intellect merely! . . . "For fear of the mob, in his attempt to cure a boil he amputated the very arm itself."[12] He never could forgive Sankara for appeasing a section of the people by applying in his commentary on the *Brahma-Sutras* the stale logic of forbidding Vedic rituals to the *Sudras*, for

11. LEW p. 566.
12. Lett. p. 32.

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relying so much on the authority of the word *Sabdapramanya* (शब्द प्रामाण्य) and not on that of the heart. He cries anxiously, "We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy; this union will give the highest philosophy." Poetry and philosophy will become friends. Science and religion will meet and shake hands.[13]

His observation that the Buddhist books, except the *Dhammapada* and some beautiful *Suttas*, were torture to read like the Hindu *Puranas* was interesting. Having been written for the ignorant one would find only one or two thoughts in a huge volume. It was a great relief to read the *Gita* after one of those huge volumes. Krishna, he declared. was the greatest of men who ever lived. Compared to his manysidedness, the *Sannyasa* of Buddha was almost a weakness. He insisted on *Dharma* (righteous enjoyment) preceding *Moksha* (Salvation) and prescribed different ideals for different people. Without enjoyment renunciation can never come; first enjoy and then you can renounce. Otherwise if the whole nation all of a sudden, supposing that were possible, takes up *Sannyasa*, it does not gain what it desires, but it loses what it had in the bargain; the bird in hand is fled, nor is that in the bush caught. When in the heyday of Buddhistic supremacy, thousands of *Sannyasins* lived in every monastery, then it was that the country was just on the verge of ruin. The standard national religion is the many-sided, comprehensive doctrine of self-less duty, preached by the *Gita*.[14]

Vivekananda's devotion to Jesus Christ was as deep as that of the sincerest Christian. Several learned clergymen acknowledged his deep understanding of the spirit of Christ, and he used to say that this was natural for Christ was after all an Oriental. When he heard the story of Magdalene who came to Jesus and washed his feet with ointment and wiped them with her hair, the Swami exclaimed, 'Had I lived in Jesus's time, I would have washed his feet with my heart's blood!' He passionately loved Christian legends like the one in which Christ conced-

13. LVR p. 301.
14. EW p. 26.

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ed the right to punish a sinner only to that man who was not guilty of a single sin, and then nobody came forward to exercise that right.

But with reverence for Christ almost ended his love for Christianity. He mercilessly criticized the so-called Christians for being unworthy of Christ. His criticism had two edges; his abhorrence for some of the Christian doctrines, and his denunciation of the destructive role played by the Christian civilization. "Speaking of Christian doctrines," says Mrs. Funke, "he remarked how abhorrent to him was the constant use of the term 'the blood of Christ.' That made me think. I had always hated the hymn. 'There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins,' but what daring to criticize an accepted doctrine of the church."[15] Vivekananda's criticism, however damaging, being always offered with genuine love, met with kindred response in innumerable Christian hearts. He told the West at the outset, "I am rather a plain-spoken man, but I mean well, I want to tell you the truth. I am not here to flatter you; that is not my business. If I wanted to do that I would have opened a fashionable church in Fifth Avenue in New York. You are my children. I want to show you the way out of self to God by pointing out to you your errors, your defects and your vanities. Therefore you do not hear me praising your current christianity, or your ideals of civilization . . . If you want to live go back to Christ. You are not Christians. No, as a nation, you are not . . . If you can join these two, this wonderful prosperity with that ideal of Christ, it is well; but if you cannot . . . better be ready to live in rags with Christ than to live in palaces without Him."[16]

Vivekananda revolted from the sense of sin pervading all Christian dogma. As a Hindu Ramakrishna was wont to look upon men and women as children of God, forms of God. The deep faith in human destiny underlying this view was heartening. Human life viewed as a vast camp of sin, a counter to settle the wages of sin with the mischievous priest lurking from behind the counter, is a gloomy, dismal picture indeed. That is why the

15. Rem. p. 145.
16. LEW p. 318-319.

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robust and the intelligent in the lands where Christianity has its sway have run away from this concept and in reality forsaken Christian theology. They use the label of Christianity, the armies of Christian priests to furtber their political and economic ends, and to recruit bands under the same banner. Only a few of those who shudder from Christianity go back to Christ; others go astray. In reality therefore Christianity divorced Christ and modern life has divorced Christianity based on sin; only a connection through lipservice subsists between the three components.

Not that Vivekananda denied the existence of sin. His concept of sin was quite simple and flexible. "It is true that no act can be regarded as stealing at all times and under all circumstances. Again every act may be considered wrong or right or even sinful under altered conditions. You should not do anything that brings misery to others, or weakens you physically or morally. That is sinful and its opposite is virtuous . . . Again, social life becomes impossible if there is no division of virtue and vice. If you retire to a forest, you can go about dancing naked; that harms nobody, and none will stop you. But should you behave so in a town, the reasonable thing to do will be to get you arrested."[17]

The other edge of Vivekananda's criticism of Christianity is its role in history. "Christianity, during its first three centuries, was not even successful in making itself known to the world;" he writes, "and since the day when the sword of Constantine made a place for it in his kingdom, what support has Christianity ever lent to the spread of civilization either spiritual or secular? What reward did the Christian religion offer to that European pundit who sought to prove for the first time that the Earth is a revolving planet? Can the literature of the Christian flock consistently meet the requirement of legal jurisprudence, civil or criminal, or of arts and trade policies? . . . In the New Testament there is no covert or overt praise of any arts and Sciences. But there is scarcely any science or branch of art that is not sanctioned and held up for encouragement directly or indirectly in the Koran, or in the many passages of Hadis, the

17. Rem. p. 31.

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traditional sayings of Mohammed . . . In modern Europe, Christianity and civilization are two different things. Civilization has girded up her loins to destroy her old enemy, Christianity, to overthrow the clergy, and to wring educational and charitable institutions from their hands." A ruthless verdict indeed! Religion is fast becoming obsolete in the West; Vivekananda's prediction of a dismal crisis in the West came true in the guise of two colossal conflagrations; some signs of the return of sanity are visible, but unless they are deeply grounded in spirituality their sway may well be temporary. The new challenges will be much more formidable, and unless spiritual currents are powerfully unleashed, abysmal tragedy will always be round the corner.

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32

ON SCIENCE

THE BANNER of scientific attitude, the trade-mark of the modern age, is upheld by Vivekananda to a lofty position in the realm of religion. In this he was so different from the traditional spiritual teacher who is generally known to demand from the disciple implicit belief and to claim to trace out his path for him. He discarded the fiction that science is all based on reason and religion on faith. Faith transcends reason, and helps it to proceed in regions where it does not by itself cut much ice; it is therefore complementary to reason. The crux of the scientific attitude lies in rejecting those promptings of faith which run counter to reason, and in provisionally accepting those which do not, with readiness to reject them the moment they are discovered to run counter to reason. This attitude was deeply ingrained in Vivekananda. I have already referred to his experimenting in young age with the hooka to see whether the custom of providing different hookas to different castes was a rational one, and to his severe testing of whatever Ramakrishna said. In the last chapter appears an excerpt from his account of the old memories that haunted him on visiting certain places. One sentence in that account, not quoted there, may be quoted here to show how his mind worked. He says, "I thought that it might be due to the law of transmigration. But soon I decided that such definite conclusions were *not reasonable*." Those conclusions could not be reasoned out; he had therefore two

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alternatives before him, one, to drop the subject altogether, and the other, to believe in the law of rebirth which could not be tested by reason, in other words to resort to faith. He chose the second alternative, and had he discovered another cause of his strange memory, he would have rejected the idea of pre-birth sensations, responsible for the memory.

Readiness to believe in the word of those who are worthy of faith is therefore one of the most reasonable ingredients of the scientific attitude. Without this readiness the most elementary truths will be inaccessible. Hardly one in a million can know through his own experience that the earth revolves round the sun; most of us know it through faith and shall continue to know it until some experience runs counter to that knowledge. Faith is therefore an indispensable aid to reason, it is not the opposite of reason; it should be used as such and not misused. It is like the glass through which you can see things not seen by the naked eye. The moment you discover that a view you get by the naked eye is different from that you get through the glass, discard the latter without the least qualm of the conscience, rejecting it is your first duty as a rational being. To Vivekananda goes the credit of proclaiming that this scientific attitude is as valid in religion as in secular knowledge. He maintained that faith, against which pseudoscientists raise an uneasy hue and cry, is as necessary in science as in religion. "If religion has its superstitions, science has its superstitions too," he remarked.

The spirit of scientific enquiry informed the rich intellectual activity of the ancient Hindus, and their conclusions are being reinforced by modern findings. Vivekananda was naturally proud of the achievements of ancient Hindu sciences particularly the mental sciences like psychology and psychic control. "Agnosticism has bulked large in men's esteem," he declared, "but has only betrayed its ignorance and arrogance by ignoring the laws and truths of the Indian science of thought-control. Western psychology has miserably failed to cope with the superconscious aspects and laws of human nature. Where European science has stopped short, Indian psychology comes in and explains, illustrates and teaches how to render real the laws appertaining to higher states of existence and experience."[1]

1. LEW 247.

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Science is busy enunciating laws. Always laying emphasis on the subjective nature of knowledge, Vivekananda defines law as "the method, the manner in which our mind grasps a series of phenomena; it is all in the mind."[2] What are known as scientific discoveries and inventions are either new reactions of the mind to the same old working of natural forces or new assembling of the same eternal matter. The fruit is eternally falling down; Newton's reaction to that sight differed from all foregoing reactions, a discovery was marked on the scientific calendar. The locomotive is a new assembling of the same heavy iron, steel and coal and water to utilize the same age-old power of steam. The distinction between a discovery and an invention is all right for a school grammar book; but scientists view them both as fresh mental reactions to natural phenomena. The human mind is therefore the paramount power; the seat of sovereignty is thus within and not without. The mind establishes new relations of the nature of cause and effect. In other words the mind works in the sphere of causation. But is that the end? No; that is not. Experience tells us that there are states in which the normal cause and effect chain is thrown to the winds. The dream state is the simplest example of this. In dreams we often undergo experiences which are absolutely meaningless; which not only defy our logic in the waking state but do not have their own logic. And dreams are experienced through the same mind, or otherwise they would not be remembered after they are broken. If they therefore defy our law of causation, how much more beyond causation would that existence be which is completely beyond the range of our mind? "Anything beyond the range of our mind and our senses is not bound by the law of causation as there is no mental association of things in the region beyond the senses." The process, a purely scientific and logical one, would lead one to the conclusion of *Advaita*, already discussed. It may only be summarised here in the words of Vivekananda uttered at one of the sessions of the Parliament of Religions, "Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one continuously changing mass in a broken ocean of matter,

2. KY p. 106.

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and *Advaita* is the necessary conclusion of my other counterpart, the soul."[3]

Vivekananda's passion for the development of the science and industry in India is well-known. He always experimented with things around him and changed them to suit the requirements of science. His experiments in bread-making at the Belur *Math* were symbolic. He tried to sink an artisan well in the *Math* for supply of pure water. His zest for practical engineering was paralleled only by his stoic courage to face failure in that department. His comments on some famous theories of modern science are worth notice. On Darwin's theory of evolution he said that "it was applicable to the animal and vegetable kingdoms, but not to the human kingdom where reason and knowledge are highly developed. In our saints and ideal men we find no trace of struggle whatever, and no tendency to rise higher and grow stronger by the destruction of others. There we find sacrifice instead. The more one can sacrifice the greater he is."[4] The theory of survival of the fittest does not apply to the rational man on the higher plane. The struggle of a rational man is against his internal nature. Our preferences in literature corroborate this. Physical struggle appeals to the primitive literary taste, the refined, developed literary thirst seeks satisfaction in an internal struggle like that in Hamlet and Dushyanta.

Some of Vivekananda's utterances curiously hinted at the tremendous destructive potentialities of the atom. The universe is one whole, therefore it would be disastrous, said Vivekananda, if this Infinite Unity were broken for a moment. If one little atom could be crushed and moved out of its place.[5]

In Vivekananda we thus find the old hoary religion of the Hindus wedded to the modern passion for industrialisation, mechanising and improving the conditions of living. In this he was a true and rare representative of the *Sanatana Dharma*, '*Sanatana*' meaning ever fresh. Indeed his first clarion call to the West was 'Give us industry and food. We shall give you

3. LEW p. 305.
4. LEW p. 615.
5. Rem. p. 291.

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religion.' Among the methods of action of the Ramakrishna Mission are significantly included:

(A) To train men so as to make them complete; to teach knowledge of such sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;

(B) To promote and encourage arts and industries.

It is worthwhile in this connection to refer to the contact between Vivekananda and the great promoter of industry in modern India, Jamshedji N. Tata. The letter written by Tata, the reply of Vivekananda to which is unfortunately not available, is quoted below in full.[6]

Dear Swami Vivekananda,

I trust you remember me as a fellow-traveller on your voyage from Japan to Chicago. I very much recall at this moment your view on the growth of the ascetic spirit in India, and the duty not of destroying, but of diverting it into useful channels.

I recall these ideas in connection with my scheme of Research Institute of Science for India, of which you have doubtless heard or read. It seems to me that no better use can be made of the ascetic spirit than the establishment of monasteries or residential halls for men dominated by this spirit, where they should live with ordinary decency, and devote their lives to the cultivation of sciences—natural and humanistic. I am of opinion that if such a crusade in favour of an asceticism of this kind were undertaken by a competent leader, it would greatly help asceticism, and the good name of our common country; and I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda. Do you think you would care to apply yourself to the mission of galvanising into life our ancient traditions in this respect? Perhaps, you had better begin with a fiery pamphlet rousing our people in this matter. I should cheerfully defray all the expenses of publication.

With kind regards, I am, dear Swami,
Yours faithfully,
JAMSHEDJI N. TATA

23rd November, 1898
Esplanade House, Bombay.

6. LEW p. 620.

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33

ON CONTEMPORARIES

WITH A HEART overflowing with warm sympathy for everyone around him, Vivekananda had an uncanny knack of summarizing his contemporaries. He was deeply interested in every sincere heart with which he came in contact, and he said a word or two of unmistakable praise for it. During his conversations he expatiated for long hours on some of his contemporaries. On various events which immediately preceded his formative career he had firm opinions. It was natural that he had the deepest veneration for religious leaders like Swami Dayananda Sarasvati. While discussing a point in *Karma-Yoga* he cites Dayananda and pays him a handsome tribute. In Punjab he expressed on numerous occasions a deep regard for 'the fearless Dayananda', and his *Arya Samaj*. In fact Vivekananda became so intimate with the leaders of the *Arya Samaj* that a rumour soon sailed afloat that he was going to embrace the *Arya Samaj* and assume its leadership!

For his teachers Vivekananda had great respect. And what giants he had as teachers! The invincible social reformer of Bengal, Pandit Isvara Chandra Vidyasagar taught him. Who could help admiring that selfless educator? "There is not a man of my age in Northern India" exclaimed Vivekananda, "on whom his shadow has not fallen." Vidyasagar was to him pre-eminently the hero of widow-remarriage and of the abolition of

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polygamy. "But his favourite story was," writes Sister Nevedita, "of that day when he went home from the Legislative Council, pondering over the question of whether or not to adopt English dress on such occasions. Suddenly someone came up to a fat Mogul who was proceeding homeward in leisurely and pompous fashion, in front of him, with the news, 'Sir, your house is on fire!' The Mogul went neither faster nor slower for this information, and presently the messenger contrived to express a discreet astonishment whereupon his master turned upon him angrily. 'Wretch !' he said, 'Am I to abandon the gait of my ancestors, because a few sticks happen to be burning?' And Vidyasagar, walking behind, determined to stick to the *shawl, dhoti* and sandals, not even adopting coat and slippers.

"The picture of Vidyasagar going into retreat for a month for the study of the *sastras*, when his mother had suggested to him the remarriage of child-widows, was very forcible. He came out of his retirement of opinion that they were not against such remarriage, and he obtained the signatures of the Pandits that they agreed in this opinion. Then the action of some native princes led the Pandits to abandon their own signatures, so that, had the Government not determined to assist the movement, it could not have been carried.....

"We could believe that a man who was able to discredit polygamy by moral force alone, was 'intensely spiritual.' And it was wonderful indeed to realize the Indian indifference to a formal creed, when we heard how this giant was driven by the famine of 1864—when 1,40,000 people died of hunger and disease—to have nothing more to do with God, and become entirely agnostic in thought."[1] Like teacher like taught. When Vivekananda spoke of several exemplary spiritual men who did not believe in God, one of the foremost of them was Vidyasagar, to be sure. Another was certainly an indomitable Scotchman whose memory Vivekananda eloquently shared with his disciples. He was David Hare, an atheist, who died while nursing a pupil through cholera. Worthy souls indeed to be contemporaneous with Vivekananda!

1. LEW p. 568.

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William Hastie, Principal of Presidency College, Calcutta, which Vivekananda attended so irregularly that he was not sent for the B.A. degree though he had passed the examination, also lived in his memory vividly. It was he, who had mentioned Ramakrishna to Vivekananda for the first time (See Section 1-II, III) 'This hot-headed old man lived on nothing, and regarded his room as his boys' home as well as his own.' He was a missionary and happened to constitute the only missionary contact of Vivekananda. Towards the end of his stay in India he used to say, "Yes, my boy, you were right, yon were right! It is true that all is God!" Vivekananda once narrated this incident and cried, "I am proud of him!" and remarked with a twinkle in his eye, "But I don't think you could say that he had christianised me much!"[2] But though he had not christianised him, he had influ enced him in speech. For his delightful slight Irish brogue was a gift of Hastie.

Among other contemporaries Dr. Jagdish Chandra Bose, the famous Botanist and natural Scientist, met Vivekananda frequently at the Paris Congress of Scientists in 1900. Vivekananda was in Paris to attend the congress of the History of Religions. His joy at the achievements of J. C. Bose was immense. He referred to Bose as the pride and glory of Bengal and used every opportunity to introduce him to his friends in warm words of appreciation. When a claim was put forward on behalf of a British scientist that he could make a stunted lily resume its growth, Vivekananda remarked youthfully, "O, that's nothing! Bose will make the very pot in which the lily grows respond!"[3]

In his presidential address to the Indian Social conference of 1900, Justice Ranade criticised the Hindu *Sannyasins* for not being useful to society, and for being a burden instead. Vivekananda obviously could not brook this criticism, and wrote a reply in '*Prabuddha Bharat*.' He appreciated the patriotic spirit of Ranade, but said that he was misinformed. He traced the origin of *Sannyasa* to the ideal of complete self-abnegation at

2. LEW p. 569.
3. LEW p. 687.

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the feet of society, and maintained that a true *Sannyasin* gives the society infinitely more than he takes. This little controversy was one of the few contacts of Vivekananda with Maharashtra the other being his meeting with Tilak already referred to.

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34

ON ORGANIZATION AND METHOD OF WORK

LIFE is a process of continuous exchange. Every moment we give and we take. The greatest giver receives quite a bit. The greatest teacher learns from the taught. In America Vivekananda the teacher was in the lime-light, and America unfailingly taught him a few lessons. The foremost of these was organization. This lesson shot into his agile mind as a revelation, with a flash. The way he disclosed to his American hosts his learning this lesson is diverting; it also points to its revealing, intuitive nature. Cornelia Conger relates how once he told her grandmother that he had had the greatest temptation of his life in America. She liked to tease him a bit, and asked, "Who is she, Swami?" One can very well imagine how the eyelids of all those present must have stretched widest to allow the drooping eyeballs enough room, how their ears must have become all attention, and how all breathing must have stopped to be resumed only on hearing the answer, which was, "Oh, it is not a lady, it is Organization."[1] America had presented him with the secret of successful work in the most enticing form!

First contacts with American life brought home to his mind the pressing need of organization which India badly lacked. He

1. Rem. p. 138.

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related how the followers of Ramakrishna, verily like most other religious and social workers in India, would station themselves in a villages and wait for the needy to come to them. For a worker of restless zest like him this was intolerable; this cool patience would spell the death of the patient. America brought this thought to the surface again and he gave deep thought to the problem of organizing work in India.

Three sources seem to have aided in shaping his ideas about organizing the Indian work. Judging from the very great work done with reticence by the Ramakrishna Mission and other organs started by Vivekananda in the short life allowed him, there remains no doubt that his concepts were the very required ones. His keen perception which transpires through his minute instructions to workers in India is simply marvellous. America taught him organization as well as warned him against the pitfalls in it. "Now take care of this. Do not try to 'boss' others, as the Yankees say." He points out with disarming naivety, "Because I always direct my letters to you, you need not try to show your consequence over my other friends. I know you never can be such a fool, but still I think it my duty to warn you. This is what kills all organizations. Work, work, for, to work only for the good of others is life."

His vigilant anxiety to see that spotless purity is maintained in relations between men and women is reflected in many of his letters. "Any woman can come to the class-room during class time or preaching hour," he enjoins, "but must leave the place directly when that period is over."

The third source of his wisdom in this respect was Sri Ramakrishna himself. Apparently a free band of stray devotees, Ramakrishna's disciples were shaped by him into a dedicated group through a deeply conceived plan. Romain Rolland avers, "Vivekananda has emphasized the originality of his methods, especially in the India of his day; since then some of his educational principles have been adopted and systematized by the new schools of Europe."[2] Vivekananda assimilated the technique of the Master and adapted it to suit the various tasks ahead.

2. LRR p. 211.

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With his characteristic sense of balance Vivekananda hinted at the disaster of excessive planning too. Too much emphasis on plans allures workers into forgetting that execution of plans is more crucial than devising them; makes them complacent, and robs them of initiative. Evolving the selfless, zealous worker is the main plank of any great work, and planning has least to do with this. Planning presupposes devoted workers and in their absence, planning does not lead to work, it leads to a fictitious sense of achievement. This was what Vivekananda suggested when he reprimanded Nivedita on her showing the need of a plan for something; "Plans! Plans!" he exclaimed with indignation. "That is why you Western people can never create religion! If any of you ever did, it was only a few Catholic saints, who had no plans. Religion was never, never preached by planners!"[3] Possibly he would have tempered himself by saying that social service was successfully done by planners only!

Several luminous positive suggestions, schemes and injunctions enliven Vivekananda's thoughts on organization. His approach is basically constructive. "Be positive;" he says, "do not criticise others. Give your message, teach what you have to teach, and there stop . . . Be patient with everybody. Why should you mix in controversies? Bear with the various opinions of everybody."[4] Be broad as the limitless sky, and love the person who least expects your love; that is the creed of a successful organizer. "To my brave boys." Vivekananda writes from New York in 1894, "Push on with the organization. Nothing else is necessary but these-Love, Sincerity and Patience. What is life but growth, that is, expansion, that is, love? Therefore all life is love, all selfishness is death." That is why he did not shut the door af his Mission to public women, or men known to be of bad character. When an objection was raised he questioned, "If we do not accept them who else will? Where should the miserable souls go?" But he is conscious of his responsibility regarding such persons; having accepted them they should be transformed, and should not be allowed to transform the Mission instead. After entering the Mission they

3. LEW p. 582.
4. IPH p. 35.

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must give up indecent life. To this end he writes in a letter, "But then some social vigilance is needed."...Instances of improper conduct are likely to be found during the festivals. Therefore, "a few men [old, preferably] should take charge as the warders of the day. They will make circuits round the scene of the festival and in case they find any man or woman engaged in impropriety of speech or conduct, they will at once expel them out of the garden."[5]

Many other little instructions he gave to the managers of the organization reveal his expert attention to detail and scrupulous flair for all-sided growth. He wished to restrict smoking to a special room. Some of his other interesting injunctions: "All correspondence should come to the secretary and he should deliver all letters unopened to their addressees!" "He who wants to indulge in invectives must do so outside the boundaries of the *Math*." To the leader he says, "Know partiality to be the chief cause of all evils. That is to say, if you show towards anyone more love than towards someone else, rest assured, you will be sowing the seeds of future troubles." Sound counsel indeed for the leader in any field! "If anybody comes to you to speak ill of any of his brothers, refuse to listen to him in *toto* . . . It is a great sin to listen even . . . In that lies the germ of future troubles . . . Moreover, bear with everyone's shortcomings." . . . Gems of thought, these, for every organizer.

Catholicism is the pivot of Vivekananda's code for the management of an organization. Once the objectives are defined, everyone is left free to chalk out his own plan of how to put them into practice. Everyone gets the greatest latitude in the sphere of his individual development. In a straightforward statement of 'What we believe in,' the Swami expressly says, "We preach neither social equality nor inequality, but that every being has the same rights, and insist upon freedom of thought and action in every way. We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense. Nor do we insist upon particular codes of morality as of conduct or character, or eating

5. Lett. p. 334.

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and drinking, except so far as it injures others . . . Each is welcome to his own peculiarity, but he has no right to criticize the conduct of others, because that would, if followed by him, injure him, much less to insist that others should follow his way."[6]

An unflinching supporter of the widest freedom to individuals to select avenues to attain the goal, Vivekananda did not believe that the Indian masses were mature enough to take policy decisions. His frank disavowal of introducing democracy in his organization at the outset indicates this. This view undoubtedly strikes a sympathetic chord in many an Indian heart, for there is quite a bit of hushed murmur in India that democracy is ill-timed for the country, that it could wait till the training it presupposes is imparted to the masses, till some sort of ability to judge events is infused, and till hero-worship is tempered by the habit of rating the nation above even the highest individual. This view is no more an insult to our intelligence than the statement of our poverty is. Vivekananda dissects the issue in a succinct statement: "In a country like India, at our present stage of development, it does not seem to me well advised to start an organization on a democratic basis in which every member has an equal voice, and decisions are arrived at by a majority of the votes of the community. With the West the case is different . . . Amongst us also, when with the spread of education *we shall learn to sacrifice, to stand above our individual interests and concerns for the good of the community or the nation at large*, then it would be possible to work on a democratic basis. Taking this into consideration, we should have for our organization at present a Dictator whose orders everyone should obey. Then, in the fullness of time, it will be guided by the opinion and consent of the members." It must be noted here that the word 'Dictator' had not (in 1897) yet fallen on evil days, which it did during the advent of the Nazis and the Fascists. It should also be noted that as an all-time arrangement he provides free election. In a letter on April 27, 1896, he says, "All the office-bearers you should elect by ballot as was the mandate of Lord Buddha."

6. Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 302.

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Superbly combining visionary idealism with a keen sense of the demands of practical life, Vivekananda expects the most spotless integrity from every field-worker. "Business is business in the highest sense," he says, "and no friendship should be there. One should keep the clearest account of everything in one's charge—and never, never apply the funds intended for one thing to any other use whatever—even if one starves the next moment." The evident greatness of small things is nowhere so obvious in a successful organization. Take care of each minute *paisa*, and the rupee takes care of itself.

Obedience is the oil which keeps an organization functioning smoothly, without friction. Friction results from a clash, and when one party agrees with the other, the cause of friction vanishes. A real worker prefers to obey to issuing orders, for there in liesactive participation, the thrill of work. In India, there is a scramble for commanding; the ravages of preaching without practising, teaching without learning eat into the vitals of Indian social life. Vivekananda's prescription of obedience is exceedingly valid for the country to-day. "Everyone wants to command and no one wants to obey;" he remarks, "this is owing to the absence of that *brahmacharya* of yore . . ." But obedience is by no means thraldom, no doglike dispassionate towing the line, no meek yesmanship. Complete obedience in the field of action, in order to deliver the goods; but full freedom of belief and opinion, that is his prescription. "Cultivate the virtue of obedience, but you must not sacrifice your own faith. No centralization is possible unless there is obedience to superiors. No great work can be done without this centralization of individual forces."[7]

7. IHP p. 28.

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35

ON MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S knowledge of secular subjects was surprisingly extensive. He reinforced his arguments in the spiritual field with copious references to secular problems, and this made him more modern than most conventionally modern men. His vast information on the topics of the day served as an inviting link between his spiritual stronghold and the world.

One would least expect Vivekananda, who was required to be initiated by his first American hostess into the art of counting money and putting it into the purse in neat roles, to know much of economics, much less to speak on it. Nonetheless, one of his first talks in America, even before the Parliament assembled, was on 'The use of Silver in India' given to the American Social Science Association which met at Saratoga Springs. He gave three talks in fact on September 6, 1893, the subject of the second being 'The Mohammedan Rule in India,' (and that of the third being not available.)[1] Another major reference to economics is found in his letter written from London to Alasinga Perumal on October 28, 1896. Those were the days of the controversy regarding the Gold Standard. Vivekananda writes, "I see that the Gold Standard has been making the poor poorer, the rich richer. Bryan was right when he said, 'We refuse to be crucified on a cross of gold.' I am a Socialist, not because I think it is a

1. SVND p. 44.

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perfect system, but because half a loaf is better than no bread."[2]

On countless historical personalities he would dwell glowingly merging his existence in them for the time. Speaking of Shivaji he paid glowing tributes to his wisdom and narrated how the *Sannyasin* was dreaded by the rulers ever since Shivaji reached Raigarh, his capital, in the guise of a *Sannyasin*, after cleverly freeing himself from Aurangzeb's prison. His delightful dissertation on 'The East and the West' contains several interesting observations on history. "The *Cheen* of our scriptures is not modern China." he remarks, "Besides in those days, the Chinamen did not call themselves *Cheen* at all. There was a distinct, powerful nation, called *Cheen*, living in the north-eastern parts of Kashmir, and the Darads lived where are now seen the hill-tribes between India and Afghanistan. Some remnants of the ancient *Cheen* are yet to be found . . . and Daradisthan is yet in existence. In the *Rajatarangini*, the history of Kashmir, references are often made to the supremacy of the powerful *Darad-Raj*." About the origin of the word *Yavana* he says that the original word is *Yavana* itself, for not only the Hindus but the ancient Egyptians and the Babylonians as well call the Greeks by that name. He discredits the theory of the derivation of the word *Yavana* from Ionia, a region inhabited by one of the tribes of the Greeks. Again he points out that in the southern parts of India many children are born with red hair, which after two or three years change into black and that in the Himalayas many have red hair and blue or grey eyes. He maintains that the Hindus therefore belong to the Aryan race, and that they, generally speaking, are the handsomest and most finely formed. He forcefully discredited the view that the Aryans had migrated to India from elsewhere. He avers, "I have been talking with the Indian and European savants on the subject and hope to raise many objections to this theory in detail when time permits." But time did not permit him! He argued against the contention that the Aryans came from abroad and conquered aboriginal tribes. He maintained that Ravana was a whit more civilized than Rama and there was no question of

2. Lett. p. 349.

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Rama attacking a less progressive kingdom. "Just read the *Ramayana* and you will find that . . . And when were these *Vanaras* and other Southern Indians conquered? They were all, on the other hand, Ramachandra's friends and allies."[3] He admitted that 'in a few places there were occasional fights between the Aryans and the aborigines', But how does this prove that their lands were taken away by the Aryas? Where in the *Ramayana* do you find that? He thus asserted that the Aryas were natives of north India and never colonized south India at the point of sword. The fusion of the Aryan culture and the culture of the inhabitants of south India was smooth.

At the Paris Congress on the History of Religions (held in August, 1900) Swami Vivekananda dwelt at length on the intercourse between ancient India and Greece. (Complete works, Vol. IV, pp. 358-362) Starting with the remark that the enthusiasm shown by Western scholars in unleashing their unrestrained imagination in showing the supposed heaps of debt owed by India to Greece was based on the slender evidence of one verse. This verse reads, "The *Yavanas* are *Mlechchhas*. In them this science is established, (therefore) even they deserve worship like *Rishis* (म्लेच्छा वै यवनास्तेषु एषा विद्या प्रतिष्ठिता । ऋषिवत् तेऽपि पूज्यन्ते···)" This enthusiasm is totally unwarranted, for the verse hints at the firm grounding the Hindu science had acquired among the *Yavanas* and does not contain an iota of evidence of Greek influence on India. Secondly, Vivekananda asks, when every step of Indian sciences can be traced from the *Vedic* times to the present day, what is the necessity for forcing the farfetched suggestion of the Greek influence on them? Thirdly, the terms in astronomy traced by some scholars to Greek roots are more easily derived from Sanskrit roots. Then, again, the theory of the influence of the Greek drama on the Sanskrit drama is illogical. "Those who have studied the mode of action and style of the dramas of both the languages must have to admit that any such likeness, if found, is only a fancy of the obstinate dreamer, and has never any real existence as a matter of fact. Where is that Greek chorus? the Greek *Yavanika* is on one side of the stage, the Aryan, diametrically on the other. The

3. EW p. 116-117.

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characteristic manner of expression of the Greek drama is one thing, that of the Aryan quite another. There is not the least likeness between the Aryan and the Greek dramas; rather the dramas of Shakespeare resemble to a great extent the dramas of India. So the conclusion may also be drawn that Shakespeare is indebted to Kalidasa, and other ancient Indian dramatists for all his writings, and that the whole Western literature is only an imitation of the Indian!"

Indeed Vivekananda maintained that Pythagoras, 'whom Clement of Alexandria called the pupil of the *Brahmanas* of India', studied the *Sankhya* philosophy and later it formed the basis of the Alexandrian and Gnostic schools of philosophy.[4] Whereas there was no evidence of Greek influence on India, affirmed the Swami, there was clear evidence of the influence of Indian philosophy on the Greek.

Vivekananda gave considerable thought to the problem of a common language for India. In his brilliant note entitled 'India's Message to the World' (Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 255) he says.

"A common language would be a great desideratum, but the same criticism applies to it, the destruction of the vitality of the various existing ones.

"The only solution to be reached was the finding of a great sacred language of which all the others would be considered as manifestations, and that was found in the Sanskrit.

"The Dravidian languages may or may not have been originally Sanskritic, but for practical purposes they are so now, and every day we see them approaching the ideal more and more, yet keeping their vital peculiarities."

Today we are adopting the unnatural course of raising English, a foreign language understood by less than two in a hundred and used with facility by a microscopic minority, to the central status of a common language. One wonders if Sanskrit could not serve the purpose better with its roots sunk deep in all our languages and with its unbroken tradition of more than two thousand years of functioning as a storehouse of vocabulary for them. There is a feeble but persistent voice

4. SPR p. 28.

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favouring elevation of Sanskrit, and it should be noted that the cry for vigorous cultivation of Sanskrit and the other tongues of India dates back at least to Swami Vivekananda. He had a passion for learning languages. His mastery of English was extraordinary. During his journeys through India (from 1889 to 1893) he mastered Sanskrit especially at Jaipur and he is said to admire the pronunciation of Sanskrit obtained in Maharashtra. At Paris in 1900 he learned French within two months well enough to converse in the language, and he lectured to the Congress of the History of Religions in French. His desire to learn Tamil is reflected in a letter written on August 23, 1896 from Switzerland in which he says: "If not, send me the Tamil edition (of a certain book) and on sheet the Tamil letters and compounds and all juxtaposed with its Nagari equivalents, so that I may learn the Tamil letters."[5]

It is interesting to note that in every branch of knowledge the effusions of Vivekananda's agile mind sprang from the mainspring of *Advaita*. Thus of law, he said, the Vedic Aryans had a true notion; they conceived it as the king of kings who never slept, who was therefore beyond causation, and himself subject to no other law, in short an embodiment of the Supreme Existence.[6] Talking on astronomy he 'confessed to a whimsical doubt as to whether the stars were not merely an optical delusion, since among the millions of man-bearing earths that must apparently exist, no beings of higher development than ours yet seemed to have attempted signalling to us.' To one who experienced the world as *maya* the stars fittingly appeared an optical delusion!

Vivekananda was not a politician in the ordinary sense of the word, but he yearned for the political freedom of India and used to say that within fifty years India would be free. He did not believe in begging freedom. 'Never are the wants of a beggar fulfilled' he declared. He discounted the efforts of the Moderates by saying, "All progress at the dictation of another, whose hand is at India's throat, is valueless in my opinion." He was conscious of the fact that freedom would not end India's

5. Lett. p. 341.
6. Rem. p. 281.

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troubles, it would only be a first step towards regeneration demanding the services of patriots more keenly. "Suppose the Government gives you all you need," he pointed out, "Where are the men able to keep up the things demanded? So make men first."[7] He foresaw the problem we are facing at the present moment. He believed that strong, unselfish bands of young men would make India free. "Of the bones of the Bengali youths" he criedonce, "shall be made the thunderbolt that shall destroy India's thraldom." He disparaged the idea that freedom would be won through resolutions, and had no faith in the Congress as it appeared in his day merely to pass pious resolutions. "But, of course," he admitted, "something is better than nothing, and it is good to push the sleeping nation from all sides to wake it up..... .....If the Congress does anything for the masses it has my sympathy."[8] It is thrilling to note that he had once mooted the idea of civil disobedience and jail-going.

He did not believe that democracy was a magic drug to cure all ills. Unless the fundamental nature of man is changed, change in the form of government would mean little. Of the condition in western countries he said, "They that have money have kept the government of the land under their thumb, are robbing and drying up all the sap out of the people and sending them as soldiers to fight and be slain on foreign shores, so that, in case of victory, their coffers may be full of gold bought by the blood of the subject-people."[9]

Yet he was aware of the irresistible force with which democracy and socialism were asserting themselves, and welcomed them as helpful adjuncts. Like most thinkers he traced the democracy in India to the age-old village-*panchayat*, but, unlike many, pointed out the incompleteness of the experiment. "There cannot be the least doubt about it, that the germ of self-government was at least present in the shape of the village-*panchayat*, which is still to be found in existence in many places of India," he remarked. "But the germ remained forever the germ; the seed though put in the ground never grew into a tree. This idea of self-government never passed beyond the embryo

7. IHP p. 37.
8. LEW p. 575.
9. EW p. 27.

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state of the village-*panchayat* system, and never spread into society at large."[10]

We have already referred to Vivekananda's food habits. He had settled notions regarding the suitability of various foods to Indians. He has devoted several pages of 'The East and the West' to discussing the relative merits of meat-eating and vegetable-eating. The miserable condition of mal-nutrition in India is aptly summarized by him in the pithy statement, "The poor die of starvation because they can get nothing to eat, and the rich die of starvation because what they take is no food."[11] Conditions today have slightly altered; the number dying of not eating anything has dwindled, but the ranks eating what is not food have swollen. He prescribes meat for martial men, and for men doing mainly physical labour. He does not believe in the absolute goodness either of meat-eating or of non-meat-eating. He lightly brushes aside the objection against meat-eating that it involves killing. A *Sannyasin*, an epitome of universal love, saying "the question whether it is right or wrong to kill animals has always been a matter of great dispute" bewilders me in the extreme. So many other assertions of Vivekananda have been open to dispute; but does he not categorically assert himself there? He simply reproduces the argument "It is simply impossible to live without killing." It is surprising to see that with all his rationality he does not stop to see if this assertion has been proved. In India today, meat is so costly that even habitual meat-eaters have to go without it. In any case, nowhere has an experiment been performed to test the validity of the claim that if man gives up meat-eating he will have to perish, nor is it ever possible to perform it. It would be as impossible as an experiment to prove that if all people speak truth this earth will become heaven. But the claim is not a sincere one and therefore does not deserve any notice. For we see that people eat meat because they like to and not because they are on the threshold of death. In another vein, Vivekananda says, "About vegetarian diet I have to say this, first, my Master was a vegetarian; but if he was given

10. Complete Works Vol. IV, p. 375.
11. EW. p. 57.

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meat offered to the Goddess, he used to hold it up to his head. The taking of life is undoubtedly sinful, but so long as vegetable food is not made suitable to the human system, through progress in chemistry, there is no other alternative but meat-eating."[12] A more fantastic argument is hard to conceive. Granting that Ramakrishna's system was not a human one, are the systems of millions of non-meat-eaters each breathing for as many years on an average as meat-eater not human systems? Here the Swami is advocating on an illogical plea something he himself brands sinful !

The argument that India's downfall was brought about by the forcing of vegetarianism, among other causes, (Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 420) lacks conviction. It is common knowledge that selfishness and lack of national consciousness were the main causes of India's national degeneration. The Hindus have not lacked fighting men, only in their dark days they fought against their brethren. Who fought against the *Rajputs* under the banner of the Mughals? The *Rajputs* themselves! Who led Aurangzeb's armies against Shivaji? Jay Singh, a Hindu! Who defeated the patriots of 1857? Again the Indian troops, and the Indian opinion (See Section 3)! (Vivekananda himself points this out—Complete Works, Vol. IV/ page 415.)

Secondly, that India is all safe for goats and hens is a fiction. In their worst days only a handful of *Brahmins* (by brith, not by tendencies) abstained from meat. Even today, an overwhelming majority of our population is composed of meat-eaters. If they do not eat meat frequently, that is because they cannot afford it.

Vivekananda enjoins in his discourses on *Bhakti-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga* that spiritual aspirants pursuing these paths should give up meat. But in a letter written on March 3, 1894, from Chicago, he says, "We leave everybody free to know, select and follow whatever suits and helps him. Thus, for example, eating meat may help one, eating fruit another."[13] Here he is speaking of spiritual aspirants. Eating meat presupposes killing, and is therefore branded 'sinful' by him; does he want to say that

12. Complete Works Vol. IV, p. 419.
13. Lett. p. 88.

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eating fruit is also sinful? However much may vegetables throb with life, equating fruit-eating with meat-eating is a hard pill to swallow. Further a spiritual aspirant, practises *ahimsa*, and therefore ought to give up meat as a prerequisite. If he does not succeed, that would be a stain of weakness, however small, on his spiritual strength.

In Vivekananda's thoughts on meat-eating there seems to be only one valid point. It is that national strength is of paramount importance, and if it is necessary to kill a few goats to maintain the efficiency of the national army, we should do the killing without hesitation. Martial men are habituated to meat-eating, and no fetish of vegetarianism need deter us from keeping them contented and in good spirits.

Vivekananda's thoughts on meat-eating glaringly focus our attention to the furious sway one's tongue exercises over one's brain and thought. His thinking is unconsciously conditioned by his own preferences. I feel certain that had he desired to give up meat he would have done so in no time. But he felt convinced of the merits of meat-eating, and, at any rate considered it a trivial matter. However trivial it may be, it cannot help giving a jolt to one.

The variety of interests, close observation and knowledge of various fields of which Vivekananda gave evidence in his short life are really super-human. It is impossible to give even a glempse of the rich intellectual life he lived. The limitations of this work permit mention of only a few instances. Describing the wide arena he could control at a time, S.K. Nair says, "He had the wonderful faculty of answering many men on many questions at one and the same time. It might be a talk on Spencer, or some thought of Shakespeare or Kalidasa, Darwin's Theory of Evolution, the Jewish history, the growth of Aryan civilization, the Vedas, Islam or Christianity—whatever the question, the Swami was ready with an appropriate answer."[14] Another disciple writes, "From the *Rig-veda* to *Raghu-Vamsha*, from the metaphysical flights of the *Vedanta* philosophy to modern Kant and Hegel, the whole range of ancient and modern literature and art and music and morals,

14. LEW p. 244.

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from the sublimities of ancient *Yoga* to the intricacies of a modern laboratory—everything seemed clear to his field of vision. It was this that confounded me, made me his slave."[15] His study of the history of the Indian dress makes amazing reading. He maintains that the dress of the ancient Greeks, Romans and Hindus was *Dhoti* and *Chadar* (an upper and a lower garment), and that the institution of tailors was almost non-existent among these. On conquering Iran, Alexander saw the merit of a tailored trouser and coat, and ordered his army to adopt that dress. The army disliked the innovation which was enforced at the point of the sword. Commenting on the backwardness of the Hindus, Vivekananda reprimands them, "Even the Mohammedans taught them to wear tailor-made clothes. Would the Hindus had learned from the Mohammedans how to eat in a cleanly way without mixing their food with the dust of the streets!"[16]

Vivekananda's thinking was a great chastening process. It was not a 'thinking for the sake of thinking' affair. His great mind thought and his great body in the form of the selfless worker executed. His marvellous brain was constantly engaged in a stern process of analysis, synthesis, and, above all, self-introspection. Observers have likened the thoughtful Vivekananda pacing a veranda to a caged lion. To my mind the image suggested by Vivekananda the thinker is that of the tiger whom he himself described displaying his marvellous faculty of observation: "When a tiger in India is on the trail of prey, if its paw or tail makes the least sound in passing, it bites it till the blood comes."[17]

15. LEW p. 272.
16. Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 313.
17. Rem. p. 281.

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36

RELIGION CHANNELIZED INTO SOCIAL SERVICE

THE MOST significant contribution of Vivekananda to religion in India was the constructive opening he provided for it. He made religion multidimensional. He brought it out from the grooves of seclusion, from the caves of the Himalayas to the plane of every-day life. He was by no means the first to declare man divine, but he was the first in modern India to mean it from the bottom of his heart and from the innermost sinew of his hands and brain and to work it out on a large scale.

The burning passion to serve the motherland which consumed him even before he met Ramakrishna received an additional edge during his contact with him. The empirical urge was now transformed into a spiritual passion. On one occasion Ramakrishna burst out in a prophetic vein, "Compassion to all creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man recognizing him to be the veritable manifestation of God!"[1] However noble a purely worldly urge to serve man may be, it smacks of condescension, of the vanity of relieving others of their misery. No, it is you, the servant

1. LEW p. 107.

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of mankind, who are relieving yourself of impurity, of selfishness. And did not Ramakrishna serve the lowest of the low till his last breath? Vivekananda was often lost in narrating how Ramakrishna, like Buddha, instructed a visitor coming from a distant place while he (Ramakrishna) lay at the door of death to be admitted only a couple of moments later.

Vivekananda's profound passion to serve the needy received a stern realistic bias during his searching journey through the motherland. Several occasions are on record when his stirring melancholy broke out in violent tears. Swami Turiyananda tells us how he found Vivekananda pacing the veranda of the house in Calcutta pouring out in a heart-rending strain the sad notes of Mirabai, "No one but the sufferer knows the pangs of sorrow." Vivekananda did not serve from a pedestal; he suffered himself, and forgot his suffering in that of other sufferers. It is this approach that prompted his historic declaration to which every religion should give constant thought. He writes from New York on October 27, 1894, "I do not believe in a religion or God which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth."[2]

In Vivekananda we thus find the age-old conflict between the spiritual life in retirement and active material life resolved in the atmosphere of practical idealism. In India the ideal of social service has been nobly practised by numerous organizations; India has known quite a few holy souls who have realized God in secluded retreats; Indian soil has also been sanctified by individual souls sacrificing everything in the service of the needy; in Vivekananda a combination of all these aspects gleams with a benign lustre. Every stage in this achievement of his was full of obstacles, and some of them came from his devoted followers pining for realization of God in seclusion. It is touching to see Vivekananda entreating them feelingly, "Can't you give away one life for the sake of others? Let the reading of *Vedanta* and the practising of meditation and the like be left for the next life!. . . . . After so much penance I have understood this—He who serves all beings serves God

2. Lett. p. 141.

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canvasser replied in the negative and feebly murmured something about the cow being the mother of the Hindus. Vivekananda was quick to retort, "Yes, that is true. Otherwise who would give birth to such talented sons?"[6] On another occasion a gentleman from Punjab came to him for religious instruction, but the Swami discussed with him possible measures to alleviate the scarcity of food in Punjab. While taking leave the visitor remarked that he had come for serious discussion but only 'commonplace matters' had been talked about. It was then that Vivekananda solemnly roared one of his inspiring utterances, "So long as even a dog of my country remains without food, to feed him is my religion, and anything else is either non-religion or false religion!"[7] When in 1897 he along with Swami Niranjanananda was the guest of an admirer at Vaidyanath, they found one evening a man helplessly lying about the road. They nursed him on the spot and took him to the house of their host, hesitating to impose another guest on him. The host not only aided in nursing the sick man, but was lost in admiration for the two guests. In 1898, when the plague in all its ferocity raged in Calcutta the Swami wanted to lose no time in starting relief operations. When the question of funds cropped up, he said with sudden determination, "Why? We shall sell the newly bought *Math* grounds if necessary! We are *Sannyasins*, we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily alms as we did before." Fortunately this step was not warranted as funds started pouring in.[8]

The crowning glory of Vivekananda's spirit of service has to be searched in the inmost recesses of his feelings for his disciples. We have already noted how he carried the shoes of Sadananda when the latter was ill during a journey. The story of the parting gift he gave to Nivedita is indeed too sacred for words. The disciple has clothed its inexpressible beauty in exquisite words. "On Wednesday of the same week (the last week). . . . . .he insisted on serving the morning meal to the same disciple (Nivedita herself). Each dish as it was offered formed the subject of playful chat; and finally, to end the

6. LEW p. 489.
7. LEW 644.
8. LEW p. 557.

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indeed!"[3] There was to be no choosiness therefore in rendering service. The loved one was not to be selected, the first needy man was God to him and serving him was worship. He often received handsome fees for his secular lectures in America, but before he reached home his pockets were empty! It would be profane to term this mere generosity; it was splendid homage to God in man. Feeding the enemy in the process of attacking that was his ideal of service; priority to the destitute, the wicked, for their need was the greatest. Who else could feed the labourers on the site of work at the monastery at Belur and bow to them with tears in the eye, saying 'I have fed the *Daridra-Narayans*!' '*Daridra-Narayana*, God the poor, is the only God that exists, ...my God, the miserable, my God, the poor of all races!' he often cried. In a letter written in 18 4 from Chicago he says, "You have read, worship God, the mother, worship God, the father!'* but I say, 'Worship God, the poor, worship God, the ignorant!—*Daridradevo bhava, murkhadeva bhava*!' "[4] The word *Daridra-Narayana* is the beautiful gift of Swami Vivekananda to the religious vocabulary of India. Popularized by Gandhi, it has sweetly stuck. "When the *Swarajist* Party of the Indian National Congress triumphed in the Calcutta Municipal Council, they drew up a programme of community work called the *Daridraseva* programme . . . . . The idea seized upon the imagination of India; and relief works for famine, flood, fire and epidemic, such as were practically unknown thirty years before, started functioning."[5]

Numerous incidents in Vivekananda's life gleaming with his burning ideal of service can very well be viewed at this distance with a gay abandon. Persons who never dreamt of the depth of reality to which the Swami carried his precepts were bewildered, and incidents amusing today due to the absence of the immediate sting resulted. The canvasser of a cow-protection campaign in Gwalior was completely disarrayed when the Swami asked him what mite he was contributing towards mitigating the famine then raging in Gwalior. The

3. LEW p. 734.
4. Lett. p. 173.
5. LVR p. 331.

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canvasser replied in the negative and feebly murmured something about the cow being the mother of the Hindus. Vivekananda was quick to retort, "Yes, that is true. Otherwise who would give birth to such talented sons?"[6] On another occasion a gentleman from Punjab came to him for religious instruction, but the Swami discussed with him possible measures to alleviate the scarcity of food in Punjab. While taking leave the visitor remarked that he had come for serious discussion but only 'commonplace matters' had been talked about. It was then that Vivekananda solemnly roared one of his inspiring utterances, "So long as even a dog of my country remains without food, to feed him is my religion, and anything else is either non-religion or false religion!"[7] When in 1897 he along with Swami Niranjanananda was the guest of an admirer at Vaidyanath, they found one evening a man helplessly lying about the road. They nursed him on the spot and took him to the house of their host, hesitating to impose another guest on him. The host not only aided in nursing the sick man, but was lost in admiration for the two guests. In 1898, when the plague in all its ferocity raged in Calcutta the Swami wanted to lose no time in starting relief operations. When the question of funds cropped up, he said with sudden determination, "Why? We shall sell the newly bought *Math* grounds if necessary! We are *Sannyasins*, we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily alms as we did before." Fortunately this step was not warranted as funds started pouring in.[8]

The crowning glory of Vivekananda's spirit of service has to be searched in the inmost recesses of his feelings for his disciples. We have already noted how he carried the shoes of Sadananda when the latter was ill during a journey. The story of the parting gift he gave to Nivedita is indeed too sacred for words. The disciple has clothed its inexpressible beauty in exquisite words. "On Wednesday of the same week (the last week). . . . . .he insisted on serving the morning meal to the same disciple (Nivedita herself). Each dish as it was offered formed the subject of playful chat; and finally, to end the

6. LEW p. 489.
7. LEW 644.
8. LEW p. 557.

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meal, he himself poured the water over the hands, and dried them with a towel. 'It is I who should do these things to you Swamiji! Not you for me!' was the protest naturally offered. But his answer was startling in its solemnity—'Jesus washed the *feet* of His disciples!'

"Something checked the answer—'But that was the *last* time!'—as it rose to the lips, and the words remained unuttered. This was well. For here also the last time had come."[9]

The gospel of service to man which Vivekananda preached and practised envisaged scrupulous indifference to politics. The close relation of patriotism with politics is so common that one is often left unimpressed by a patriot keeping politics at an arm's length. Several letters of Vivekananda speak of his anxiety not to be mixed with politics. He writes on September 27, 1894, from America, "One thing I find in the books of my speeches and sayings published in Calcutta. Some of them are printed in such a way as to savour of political views; whereas I am no politician. I care only for the spirit—when that is right everything will be righted by itself . . . . . I have said a few harsh words in honest criticism of Christian Governments in general, but that does not mean that I care for, or have any connection with, politics."[10]

The rationale of eschewing politics from activities of social service seems to me quite plain. Politics even in those days of foreign domination was inextricably mixed up with offices of power, profit and popularity which are obviously repugnant to the ideal of selfless service. As Isherwood says, "My kingdom is not of this world" is said or implied by all true spiritual prophets. Further, as Vivekananda saw it, the proper order of things was man-making first, and everything else next. Here he was perfectly right; for a nation having the intrinsic merit cannot remain long under foreign yoke, and a free nation not having the necessary qualities is overridden by its own weakness. As already remarked the Congress of those days did not foster real strength, and in comparison the zealous followers of Ramakrishna did much to serve the people. Vivekananda

9. LEW p. 748.
10. Lett. p. 735.

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compared the two and concluded in favour of the latter. In February 1900, he writes from California, "In these days of dire famine, flood, disease and pestilence, tell me where your Congressmen are! Will it do merely to say, 'Hand the government of the country over to us'? And who is there to listen to them? If a man does work, has he to open his mouth for anything? If there be two thousand people like you working in several districts, won't it be the turn of the English themselves to consult you in matters of political moment?"[11] Added to this line of thought was his conviction of the foreign rule being a necessary evil through the medium of which India was paying for its past mistakes and sluggishness, and his mystic vision that India would attain freedom within fifty years.[12] Fundamentally, moreover, his renouncing nature revolted against so worldly an affair as politics discussing day and night one's powers, and another's privileges. It is natural therefore that he should choose nourishing the basic springs of the country's social life rather than manage the outer effusions of those springs. When he said 'if the spirit is all right, everything will be righted automatically' he meant every syllable of it, and vividly imagined the process.

Of his gospel of service, self-criticism was a vital adjunct. 'Serve others and criticize self' is the motto of every self-effacing servant of society. In a letter to J.J. Goodwin he writes, "We *Vedantists* in every difficulty ought to ask the subjective questions: 'Why do I see that?' 'Why can I not conquer that with love?" "There is no power on earth to injure us unless we first injure ourselves. . . . No bacilli can attack the human frame until it is degrated and degenerated by vice, bad food, privation and exposure. The healthy man passes scatheless through masses of poisonous bacilli."[13] Of course, this self-searching is always to be done in a constructive and optimistic spirit; idle speculation was more harmful than thoughtlessness. Thought must lead to action, otherwise it becomes stale. Moreover, self-searching is a process to be discreetly limited to the four walls

11. Lett. p. 441.
12. Rem. p. 367.
13. IHP p. 20.

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of the nation. Vivekananda admitted that there were many drawbacks in our religious and social life, but gave a wise counsel, saying, "but that does not mean that it is necessary to tell the English people about all these things by publishing them in the newspapers. There is no greater fool than one who washes one's dirty linen in public."

Love was the only valid basis for service. Love pumps up energy, lights the path and works miracles. Indians have become habituated to speaking love and cultivating hatred on the narrowest pretext. It is a bitter irony of fate that "We are object-lessons of the violation of that law (viz., none can hate others without degenerating himself,) which our ancestors were the first to discover and disseminate." Perfect selflessness is the antidote to hatred. Love comes of widening one's horizon, and love results in efficiency too. It also gives the coveted fruit of knowledge. "As you go on your way serving others, you will, on a parallel line, advance in the path of knowledge."

In this noble ideal of service philanthropy was obviously out of place. The comparison here is not between what people sacrifice but between how they do it. In this limitless creation no quantity is anything more than infinitesimal. One volcanic eruption may devour millions of philanthropic gestures, and one flood may wash away countless buildings and other symbols which we proudly call ours. Quantity therefore does not matter so much as quality. The spirit of dedication should inform all our service; condescension revolts against the grand ideal of service in which the receiver is enshrined and the giver is humble. "Be grateful" says Vivekananda, "that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself."

But this does not mean that the quantum of the gift is irrelevant. It only means that the quantity of service is meaningful to the giver only when he has cultivated the spirit of calm dedication. One who is fired by this spirit will give away nothing less than his all, and will pine with the thought that it is not much. To expand his all will be his constant effort. One of Vivekananda's favourite themes was: Be kings; beggars have little to part with.

Vivekananda prescribed a hierarchy of services in order of their need to man and their intrinsic merit. In different parts

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of India he laid stress on different aspects of social service. For instance, Punjab, the land of the five rivers, was, he felt, spiritually dry; emphasis was there laid on religious and spiritual education. In Bengal and Madras, the tendency of building spiritual castles in the air was more pronounced; here he called for service in the field of material needs. Without an objective outlet to one's spiritual longing, it tends to lead nowhere like so many bubbles of air. He therefore exhorted the people to supply the social needs of the town or locality where they lived.

In the gradation of services which Vivekananda contemplated spiritual help was the first in importance. Next to spiritual comes intellectual help; then follow gifts of food and clothes. Of course, the recipient must be fit to assimilate the particular help he is being offered. In the tradition of Buddha who demanded of his disciples that a hungry man must first be fed and rested and then instructed, Vivekananda was deeply sensitive to news of famine or food scarcity in any part of India. In the case of material needs, however, superfluity is reached early, but in man's intellectual and spiritual life, the more the offer the greater the demand. The standard form of service which he outlined the social worker should try to give is dissemination of enlightening education and noble ideals. In an eloquent declaration of the purpose of his life he summarizes his gospel of service: "I am born to organize these young men, nay hundreds more in every city are ready to join me, and I want to send them rolling like irresistible waves over India bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most down-trodden."[14]

14. Lett. p. 85.

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37

EDUCATION

EDUCATION OCCUPIES an important position in Vivekananda's scheme of social regeneration. He defined education in various ways on different occassions. The shortest definition was the one he gave in 1892 in reply to a question asked by the Prince of Khetri. It was: 'Education is the nervous association of certain ideas.' Some of his other definitions are: 'The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education."[1] 'True education may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently.' Thus he felt that education should strengthen the will-power and need not supply information; information could be collected from books; but books do not impart education. Books 'tell' you ideas, you may cram the words clothing them, but that takes you nowhere so far as assimilation of those ideas is concerned. "If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library."[2]

In the modern 'hold-all' education we sadly miss the essentials of real education. Vivekananda was completely

1. Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 423.
2. IHP p. 51.

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dissatisfied with the modern education. "The present system of education is all wrong," he said, "The mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think. Control of the mind should be taught first. If I had my education to get over again and had any voice in the matter, I would learn to master my mind first, and then gather facts if I wanted them. It takes people a long time to learn things because they cannot concentrate their minds at will."[3]

Well educated people are a real national asset. The strength of a nation depends not on how many lumps of flesh and bone breathe in its precincts, but on the number of people having a good education, that is, having a strong will and efficiency in handling specialized tasks. England has seven crores of men and women, and most of them are educated, with the result that a vast potential field is open from which the topmost English talent is recruited. India has seventy crores of human beings, but hardly a crore are educated enough to constitute a potential promise of leadership. Education is the key to all national problems.

Education is essentially an individual, private process. Each single human life is a momentous experiment, and education is the method of that experiment. Education must ensure and encourage the full and free blooming of man's personality; it cannot brook totalitarian treatment. "Individuality is my motto," declared Vivekananda in a letter in 1895, "I have no ambition beyond training individuals."

Vivekananda was intensely conscious of the fact that the system of education introduced by the British was a vast *baboo*-manufacturing machine. He bitterly complained of the pedagogues who were "making parrots of our boys and ruining their brains by cramming a lot of subjects into them." The armies of graduates and matriculates were already in his day flocking at the employment exchanges (or their equivalents in those days). He correctly felt therefore that "it would be better if the people got a little technical education so that they might find work and earn their bread, instead of dawdling about and

3. Rem. p. 374.

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crying for service."[4] Vivekananda's plan of education for India contemplated a balanced development resulting out of knowledge of Western science and technology subordinated to the spirituality and renunciation of *Bharat*. He was anxious to foster scientific and industrial education in India, and from his first lecture onwards in America he constantly asked that prosperous nation to send out to India instructors in industry instead of industry. The 'Salem, Evening News' (of Salem, U.S.) says in its account of Vivekananda's talk in the town, "The speaker explained his mission in this country to be to organize monks for industrial purposes, that they might give the people the benefit of this industrial education and thus elevate them and improve their condition."[5] Later the details of this plan were not worked out in practice, but his enthusiasm for technical education remained unabated and he sough to try indigenous sources. He fondly dreamed of a vast network of educational centres in India in which the East would welcome the West. A glimpse of his enormous vision is afforded by the following extract: "Gradually in these main centres will be taught agriculture, industry, etc., and workshops will be established for the furtherance of arts. To sell the manufactures of those workshops in Europe and America, associations will be started like those already in existence. It will be necessary to start centres for women exactly like those for men."

Vivekananda's penetrating insight had grasped the paramount need of technical education in India. "I want sappers and miners in the army of religion," he used to say. He defined technology as the ability to handle powers so as to bring the best results out of the smallest of causes. He contemplated use of such scientific and technical aids as the magic lantern, maps, the globe and chemicals, and instruction in such diverse subjects as astronomy, geography, and chemistry in the dialect of the people without any distinction of caste or creed.[6]

Vivekananda favoured the ancient *gurukul* system of education in which the pupil comes in close contact with the teacher whose character is pure like the blazing fire. Through the fusion

4. IHP p. 50.
5. SVA p. 32.
6. Lett. p. 102.

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of personalities the pupil not only learns the necessary subjects, but assimilates a way of life. Of course the teacher should be able to come down to the level of the student and to think through his mind, and gradually elevate him. The real teacher does not sell knowledge. In an illuminating address on 'Education' given in London, Vivekananda elaborated the noble ideal of the ancient Hindu teacher. He told audience that the teacher who taught for the money-making was a traitor to the highest and deepest truth. For, he said, 'Education is an integral part of religion and neither one nor the other should be bought or sold.'

A fascinating institution that formed part of his scheme of education was that of mobile teachers. In India, cases of pupils unable or disinclined to go to school are numerous. In many states the experiment of compulsory primary education is in progress. In many places apathy for the school is reported, and its major ground is economic; parents can ill afford to shut up in the school the young wage-earner or help on the farm. Ninety years ago Vivekananda's far-seeing vision was marvellously projected into this problem of today. "Even supposing we are in a position to open schools in each village free," he writes in a letter in 1894, "still the poor boys would rather go to the plough to earn their living than come to your school. . . . . .If the poor cannot come to education, education must reach them at the plough, in the factory, everywhere."[7] The problem of mass education appears today to elude a quick and real solution. The experiment suggested by Vivekananda of organizing mobile teaching squads is indeed worth trying. It deserves to be included in the new education programme announced by the Rajiv government.

7. Lett, p. 105.

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38

SOCIAL REGENERATION

THE MODERN outlook that Vivekananda brought to bear upon the ancient truths of *Vedanta* was perhaps nowhere so evident as in his vigorous championship of the masses. He always reminded his audience that supremacy of the masses was the watchword of the age. He was often the guest of the princes; but he was by no means under their obligation. Listen to his shrill call to the *Maharaja* of Mysore: "My noble prince, this life is short, the varieties of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive. One such high, noble-minded and royal son of India as your Highness, can do much towards raising India on her feet again."[1] On November 11, 1893, he writes to Alasinga Perumal from Chicago, "See the *Raja* of Ramnad and other friends from time to time and urge them to sympathize with the masses of India. Tell them how they are standing on the neck of the poor; and that they are not fit to be called men if they do not try to raise them up." He was a bitter critic of the higher castes among the Hindus whom he called tyrants. The slavery India was labouring under was the outcome of the tyranny of the upper classes, for 'the obverse is tyranny and the reverse slavery; the slave and the tyrant are synonymous.' His stirring chastisement of the educated Indian has not lost its sting even tody. "So long as the millions live in

1. Lett. p. 108.

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hunger and ignorance," he said, "I hold every man traitor, who having been educated at their expense pays not the least heed to them!"[2]

Vivekananda had implicit faith in the ultimate good sense of the masses of India. He emphasized the fact that the source of all power was the people; even if they had not read a single book, they had not acquired what he called 'the tailor-made civilization,' their instinct was in conformity with the national tradition. This belief made him accept several time-honoured religious and social customs which were obnoxious to a mind like Rabindranath Tagore. In answer to Rolland's question: "Do you think that Vivekananda in India tried to check the abuses in this line (in the line of animal-sacrifices, etc.)?" Tagore said, "So far as I can make out, Vivekananda's idea was that we must accept the facts of life. . . . . It was because Vivekananda tried to go beyond good and evil that he could tolerate many religious habits and customs which have nothing spiritual about them." (*Rolland and Tagore*, p. 100) Vivekananda believed that all obsolete customs tend to vanish unless they are made to linger on by selfish and interested parties. The real solution therefore lay, he said, in fostering unselfish living.

The priests and other traditionally privileged classes were, to be sure, these interested parties, and Vivekananda minced no words in denouncing them. "If you grind down the people you will suffer," he told them, "We in India are suffering the vengeance of God. Look upon these things. They ground down the poor people for their own wealth, they heard not the voice of distress, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread, and the Mohamedans came upon them slaughtering and killing."[3]

The evil of priesthood in India co-existed with the rigid caste system if it did not spring out of it. The idea of caste, Vivekananda was convinced, was the greatest dividing factor.[4] He lashed out furiously against priestcraft. "Kick out the priests who are against progress," he commanded, "because they

2. IHP p. 70.
3. SVA p. 23.
4. Lett. p. 383.

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would never mend.....They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priestcraft first."[5] The tyranny of the Hindu priesthood which bred such monstrous customs as '*Sati*' was that of the minority, and therefore was the worst evil. Under the sweeping sway of these priests religion in India had degenerated into what Vivekananda aptly called 'Don't touchism.'

In his characteristic anxiety not to destroy the basic fabric of society in the process of 'kicking out' the priest Vivekananda brought out the salient features of the Caste system as he believed it to have obtained in ancient *Bharat*. This was in conformity with his fundamental concept of social change as evolution as against revolution. A thorough overhauling of society was necessary. But how to do it? He did not want to demolish the old and build on the remains. Though obliterated by the evil customs, the goodness of the Indian social structure could shine forth again. The changes would be of the nature of evolution, 'not from error to truth, but from truth to higher truth, not from bad to good, but from good to better.' This evolution must be in keeping with the genius of the nation; a natural flowing forward towards maturity. He discounted the idea of imitating a foreign culture; that would not only be disastrous but impossible. In a talk in Detroit he beautifully elaborated this point: "A river flows a thousand miles down a circuitous mountain side to where it joins the seas and a man is standing there to tell it to go back and start anew and assume a more direct course! That man is a fool. You are a river that flows from the heights of Zion. I flow from the lofty peaks of the Himalayas. I don't say to you, go back and come down as I did, you are wrong."[6] He once told Nivedita, "My hope is to see again the strong points of India, reinforced by the strong points of this age, only in a natural way. The new state of things must be a growth from within."

The wave of imitation of the West even in such matters as dining on the table, pre-marriage dating and love, no longer sweeps the educated Indian off the sands of his way of life as it

5. CCS p. 45.
6. SVA p. 171.

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did fifty years ago, thanks to the clarion call of Vivekananda and other great sons and daughters of modern India. The majority of Indians it never touched. But in Vivekananda's lifetime it was assuming ferocious proportions with every day that dawned. To combat it Vivekananda pressed into service an amazing variety of arguments, his wide observation and knowledge of history. The caste system engaged his attention most. The main arguments he used to this end are here indicated in a nutshell.

Firstly, caste is a natural adjunct of society. Caste will remain as long as man has to depend on other men. Caste will not go, what will go will be the privileges. Every caste performs a useful function in society, and is as important as every other caste. "You can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of shoes; but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my pair of old shoes?" demanded Vivekananda with disarming forthrightness. He described how in America they "are struggling all the time to make a caste. As soon as man gets a bag of dollars, he says, 'I am one of the Four Hundred.'"

Secondly, the doctrine of *Svadharma* (choice of duty in accordance with the inherent tendency) is universally valid, and it is on this doctrine that the rigid caste-system of the Hindus was founded. Individuals have their inherent characteristics, and so do groups. Vivekananda illustrates this latter aspect of the doctrine from British history. "In the English character, the 'give and take' policy, the business principle of the trader, is principally inherent. The Englishman humbly submits to the king and to the privileges of the nobility; only if he has to pay a farthing from his pocket, he must demand an account of it. There is the king; that is all right; he is ready to obey and honour him; but if the king wants money, the Englishman says: All right, but first let me understand why it is needed, what good it will bring; next, I must have my say in the matter of how it is to be spent, and then I shall part with it. The king, once trying to exact money from the English people by force, brought about a great revolution. They killed the king."[7]

One of the benefits of the caste system in India is that the

7. EW p. 22.

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money and talent of the members of a caste are generally utilized for the good of his caste. In the world community of human beings, there are numerous groups and every group working within its limitations tends to benefit its members. The greater the individual, the larger the sphere of his influence. Nonetheless even great individuals help their castes in pushing forward. Dr. Ambedkar was a great man of national significance, and it is well known that his caste owed much of its recent progress to his immense stature and far-reaching vision.

Vivekananda thought that caste depended on the men's qualities in the ancient days, but in the course of two or three generations it acquired a hereditary form. In old days when communications were difficult and life was not as specialized and complex as it is today, in a vast majority of families, vocation passed on from father to son. Today this majority has certainly diminished, but has not become a minority. The hereditary system of caste is conducive to the cultivation of skill in the various vocations. Men practising the same vocation for generations naturally attain the maximum proficiency.[8]

An interesting observation made by Vivekananda on caste is that everybody is composed of all castes. A professor worrying about his casual leave is not a *Brahmin*, but a *Shudra*, a writer negotiating for the amount a royalty is not a *Brahmin*, but a *Vaishya* (trader); a labourer engrossed in the Lord's worship is not a *Shudra*, but a *Brahmin*. This awareness of sharing the attributes of all castes will hit at the root of arrogant caste-consciousness. When a group of devotees is immersed in singing devotional songs, who is the *Brahmin* and who the *Shudra*? All are at that time *Brahmins*.

This exquisite concept culminates in the superb ideal of castelessness. From caste to no caste is the plan chalked out for the individual by the ancient Hindu seers. This castelessness does not refer to any state of society, it epitomizes the highest ideal of the individual for attaining which the caste-system is the training school. This casteless ideal being is also

8. It may be noted here that Tilak's views on the caste-system in India are almost identical.

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referred to as the ideal *Brahmana*. "The plan in India is to make everybody *Brahmana* the *Brahmana* being the ideal of humanity. . . . . We have to raise everybody without bringing down anybody. . . . . .By the *Brahmana* ideal what do I mean? I mean the ideal *Brahmananess* in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race."[9]

Vivekananda strived to practise this ideal. He initiated the inmates of the Belur *Math* belonging to all castes into formal *Brahmanahood* to the chagrin of several orthodox Hindus. This was designed to be a practical demonstration of the process of *Brahamanization*. It is heartening to note that Pandit Nehru visualizes the same ideal towards which the India of his conception is marching: "(The ideal of the West) is not so unlike the old *Brahman* ideal of service, but it means the *Brahamanization* of all classes and groups and the abolition of class distinctions. It may be that when India puts on her new garment, as she must, for the old and tattered, she will have it cut in this fashion, so as to make it conform both to present conditions and her old thought. The ideas she adopts must become racy to her soil." (Autobiography, p. 432.)

Vivekananda was confident that the rigid walls separating caste from caste would vanish due to economic causes, and therefore all the wrath of zealous reformers was, in his opinion, misdirected. "With the introduction of modern competition see how caste is disappearing fast! No religion is now necessary to kill it. The *Brahmin* shopkeeper, shoemaker and winedistiller are common in Northern India. And why? Because of competition." In this he was clearly ahead of his times, for today we find most of the social reforms advocated vigorously by the reformers silently slipping themselves in the social structure under economic pressure.

That evils like caste privileges, childmarriage, etc., have nothing to do with religion but are political and social ills was one of Vivekananda's most original observations. He boldly declared, "Beginning from Buddha down to Ram Mohan Roy, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious

9. CCS p. 10.

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institution and tried to pull down religion and caste together, and failed."[10] Religion has no business to interfere in social matters. Religion aiming at realization of the universal unity cannot be held responsible for multiplying distinctions and privileges. The priests donning the robes of religion were instrumental in creating vicious distinctions and they pleaded that these were designed at promoting the consciousness of *Advaita*. This was, said Vivekananda, like washing mud with mud.

What is true of caste is true of child-marriage. The mockery of early marriage was practised in India seventy years ago when brides of four and five marrying matching bridegrooms were not uncommon. Indeed, the cradle was not infrequently the marriage pandal! This early marriage was condemned without reservation by Vivekananda. He writes on December 28, 1893, "We are very regular in marrying our girls at eleven years of age, lest they should become corrupt and immoral. What does our Manu enjoin? Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons."[11] But in the case of marriages of girls at fifteen and those at twenty five, there could be no doctrinal differentiation. The right or wrong in this range was to be decided in accordance with the exigencies of individual cases.

In the problems of women, as in other social problems, Vivekananda's approach basically was that of 'man in the rain opening the umbrella'. He said the problems of women should be left to be solved by women. When asked what he thought of the widow problem, he sarcastically rejoined, "Let me answer once for all—am I a widow that you ask me that nonsense? Hands off! They will solve their own problems." This is one of his remarks that are bound to shock the rationalistic thinker and social reformer.

It was more amusing than surprising to see this robust monk unconcerned with the waves of chivalry that surged around him in America. Sister Christine's expression of her sense of discomfiture at this is as revealing as it is interesting. "All fine men reverence womanhood;" she says, "the higher the

10. Lett. p. 73.
11. Lett. p. 78.

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type, the greater the reverence. But here was one who gave no heed to the little attentions which ordinary men paid us. We were allowed to climb up and slide down the rocks without an extended arm to help us. When he sensed our feeling, he answered, as he so often did, our unspoken thought, 'If you were old or weak or helpless, I should help you. But you are. . . .as able as I am. Why should I help you? Because you are a woman? That is chivalry and don't you see that chivalry is only sex?' . . . . . Knowing the criticism that awaited him in India, he still dared in America to initiate into *Sannyasa* a woman, for he saw in her only the sexless self."[12]

The lasting impression of Vivekananda's thoughts on Indian social life is that of serene nobility. The social structure of the Hindus is not designed to conquer but to absorb conquerors, to protect the weak, and to promote spirituality. Despite the internal and external onslaughts, it lives with its ancient splendour and adjusts itself with the age not with a sense of guilt, but with that of fulfilment. I shall close this chapter to the sublime note of Pandit Nehru's relevant remarks on the occasion of the taking over of India's Presidency by Dr. Radhakrishnan from Dr. Rajendra Prasad: "There was a certain nobility about it. It can only be done by a nation with a background, with a long history, a nation which has learned how to behave. There was nothing showy about it, but generations of breeding about it. It represented. . . . . an outlook—it accepts the past, it honours the past, it wants to remember the past, it looks to the future." ('The Times of India,' May 16, 1962.)

12. Rem. p. 215.

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39

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND MATH

THE RAMAKRISHNA Mission is the living monument to Vivekananda. After his triumphant return from the West in 1897 he called a meeting of all disciples and prominent followers of Ramakrishna. The plan for the establishment of an organization to preach and practise the ideals of *Advaita* as well as to carry on philanthropic and relief work was outlined by the Swami and the Ramakrishna Mission Association was founded. Its General President was Swami Vivekananda, and Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda became the President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta branch.

In 1899, a *Math* or monastery was established at Belur, and it was handed over to a Board of Trustees in 1901. The *Math* was found necessary to provide an exclusive centre for spiritual training. Thus the two branches of work were bifurcated, the *Math* imparting religious and spiritual instruction and the Mission catering to the material needs of the people. The Trustees of the *Math* were identical with the members of the Governing Body of the Mission, and thereby the inner unity of the two branches was preserved. In 1909 the Mission was duly registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The formal management of the two organizations was kept independent.

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The following extracts from the resolutions passed at the time of installation of the Mission will give an idea of the work planned by the twin organizations.

Methods of Action: (a) and (b) embody the promotion of sciences and arts and industries already referred to.

(c) To introduce and spread among the people in general *Vedantic* and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Shri Ramakrishna.

Indian Work Department: The activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of *Maths* and *Ashramas* in different parts of India for the training of *Sannyasins* and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people by going from one province to another.

Foreign Work Department: The work in this Department would be to send trained members of the Mission to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of *Vedanta* in order to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

The Mission would have no connection with politics.

Anyone believing in the objects of the Mission, or is willing to cooperate, or sympathizes with them is eligible for the membership of the Mission.

Similar clauses were incorporated in the constitution of the Ramakrishna *Math*.

As the years rolled by, the *Math* and the Mission extended their activities to all states of India and to Burma, Ceylon, Singapore, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Brazil and other countries. Several periodicals in most of the Indian and foreign languages started functioning.

The instruction given in the *Maths* includes lessons in meditation and other spiritual exercises, study of philosophy, manual work and training in sciences, arts and crafts like gardening, agriculture, medicine, animal husbandry, baking, cooking, etc.

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On the philanthropic side, the work of the Mission is superb in its design and its execution. During the epidemics and famines, the Mission worked marvellously. The Mission workers are even today known for their silent but substantial help to sufferers. Numerous workers of the Mission were observed wading in waist—deep water to save human beings and property in the floods and storms in the South recently.

This powerful nucleus has been silently but steadily growing, and will continue to grow.

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40

A LOVER OF NATURE AND ART

SPIRITUAL giants who care to express the inner working of the mind cannot help being poets. Poetry is expression of passion, and spiritual ecstasy is a passion in which one loses himself most. In the Indian tradition religious souls have frequently been great poets, and devotional poetry has been a most lavishly cultivated and exceedingly sweet branch of mediaeval poetry in most of the Indian languages. To name the greatest early poets in Hindi, Bengali Marathi etc., is to name the foremost spiritual leaders in Indian history. Tulsidas and Surdas, Chaitanya and Ramprasad, Jnaneshwar and Tukaram are only a few of these illustrious names. Shankaracharya, the great propagator of *Advaita*, is himself credited with some lovely lyrics.

The heart of an artist co-lived with stubborn rationality in Vivekananda's personality. Poets, painters and musicians do not exhaust the ranks of artists; they are only those who express; they speak what many feel. Many a great artist is too busy living art to express it. Vivekananda was one such. Talking to Nivedita about the spirit of man-worship in India, he said, "This idea of man-worship exists in nucleus in India, but it has never been expanded. You must develop it. Make poetry, make art, of it."[1] This shows his lofty conception of art.

1. LEW p. 658.

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Vivekananda was a passionate lover of nature. Mountains, rivers and forests held irresistible attraction for him. After long lecture seasons he felt enormous joy in retiring to the placid atmosphere of a forest. Once during such a relaxation he remarked, "We end life in the forest as we begin it, but with a world of experience between the two states." Often in this way he would garb nature in a spiritual observation. He commented enthusiastically on the Hindu genius of choosing sites of enchanting scenic beauty for the temples and other monuments. "The rock of Hari Parvat (in Kashmir) rises red out of blue water, like a lion couchant, crowned!" he exclaimed during his tour of Kashmir, "And the temple of Martanda has the valley at its feet!" His mood of pure love of nature frequently conceded an upper hand to the philosopher in him; at such times he interpreted nature in the light of *Advaita*. In her account of the second journey to the West in which she accompanied the Swami, Nivedita says, "As we entered the Straits of Messina, the moon rose, and I walked up and down the deck beside the Swami while he dwelt on the fact that beauty is not external, but already in the mind. On one side frowned the dark crags of the Italian coast, on the other, the island was touched with silver light. 'Messina must thank *me*!' he said, 'It is *I* who give her all her beauty!' "[2] On another occasion, during a lovely nightbathed in entrancing moon light, he spoke with frenzy of the ravishing beauty of nature, only to wind up with the remark 'And if all this *Maya* is so beautiful, think of the wondrous beauty of the Reality behind it!'[3]

Vivekananda loved literature, music and painting. Religious literature tended to be drab and monotonous, he complained, and he sifted interesting works from the mass of Vedic and Buddhist scriptures and referred to and quoted them in his talks and conversations. "He would tell how after the *Nirvana* (passing away) of Buddha, he became the very embodiment of the highest spiritual poetry, and he would illustrate his thoughts with beautiful passages from the Buddhist scriptures relating to the famous *Questions of Upali the Barber*, or the *Dhaniya Sutta*

2. LEW p. 651.
3. LEW p. 661.

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from the *Sutta Nipata*." He had read several English poets and his talks were lavishly interspersed with extracts from Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Gray and Shelley. He called Walt Whitman 'the *Sannyasin* of America', and had read him and other major American poets. Mrs. Funke tells us that 'he considered most of our (American) poetry to be obvious, banal, without the delicacy of that of his own country.' He had the poet's heart, and the most insignificant things interested him immensely. "A bird, a flower, a butterfly, will start him off, and he will tell us stories from the *Vedas* or recite Indian poetry. I recall that one poem started with the line 'Her eyes are like the black bee on the lotus.'"[4] He was very fond of Kalidasa and had high opinion on the whole of Sanskrit poetry. K. S. R. Sastri describes how he explained to him the noble purport of the beautiful description of the Himalayas occurring in the first verse of Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava*. The verse reads as follows:

> Exists on the northern boundary the emperor of mountains called Himalaya ensouled by Gods, standing as the measuring rod of the earth, touching the oceans to the east and the west.

He said that the phrases 'ensouled by God' and 'measuring rod' were of supreme importance: the first emphasized the spirituality of nature and the second affirmed that the civilization of India was so lofty as to need a measuring-rod like the Himalayas. On another occasion in the vicinity of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks he extolled Kalidasa for his grand idea of nature making eternal 'spousely sacrifice' (*Sati*) in the form of the offerings of snow to God Shiva. He indulged in the twin loves of the mountains and poetry one igniting the other.

References have already been made to Vivekananda's proficiency in the theory and practice of music. In America he heard Western music and compared it with Indian music. After attending a programme probably in the morning he remarked,

4. Rom. p. 264.

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"First I do not understand why the program says that this same program will be repeated on Saturday evening. You see, in India one type of music is played at dawn. The music for noontime is very different, and that for the evening is also of a special character . . . . . The other thing that seems strange to me is the lack of overtones in the music and the greater intervals between the notes. To my ears it has holes in it like that good Swiss cheese you give me!"[5]

He was a singer of so high an order that had he practised singing regularly like an artist he would have earned undying fame only on that account. He was a complete singer, with the singer's proverbial moodiness and all! Manmath Nath Choudhury of Bhagalpur describes two happy days the Swami spent there: "Once I noticed him humming a tune to himself. So I asked him if he could sing. He replied, 'Very little'. Being pressed hard by us he sang, and what was my surprise to see that as in learning, so in music he had wonderful accomplishment! Next day I asked him if he were willing that I should invite some musicians; he consented and I asked many musicians, several of whom were *ostads*, or adepts in the art, to come. Believing that the music would end by nine or ten at the latest, I did not arrange for supper for the guests. Swamiji sang without ceasing till two or three in the morning. All without exception were so charmed, that they forgot hunger and thirst and all idea of time !. . . . . Kailas Babu, who was accompanying the Swami (on *tabla*), was forced to give up finally for his fingers had become very stiff. . . . . The next evening, all the guests of the previous night, and many others, presented themselves without any invitation. The player on the instrument also came, but Swamiji did not sing that evening. So everyone was disappointed."[7] On another occasion, at Mount Abu, while taking a stroll with his friends, the Swami went to the roadside, sat among the stones commanding a grand view of the lake, and began to sing. Some Europeans who were nearby were charmed by the music and waited for some hours to get a glimpse of the singer. At last the singer came out to receive the unexpected

5. SVA p. 95.
6. LEW p. 194.

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congratulations waiting for him. The Sanskrit songs of Jayadeva were his special favourite. He would sing them in the appropriate *raga* and harmonize sound and sense so marvellously that one would feel the ultimate object of music tangibly attained. The aim of music according to Vivekananda was to express an idea primarily through sound (and not through word as language does), and in his singing he achieved it.

A remark by Nivedita tells us that Vivekananda was a painter too, and this completes his portrait as an artist. He seems to have been sensitive in a childlike way to criticism of his painting and this charming facet seems to correspond to his moodiness as a singer ! In his pleasant little essay on 'The East and the West' he compares western painting and sculpture with Indian, and for once surrenders the gauntlet to the West. "It will take us a long time yet to become as good and efficient as they are in the arts of painting and sculpture," he says, "We were never very skilful in those two departments of art."[7] There is no indication in the accounts of his journeys in India of his visiting Ajanta and Ellora; had he known or seen the paintings of Ajanta and the sculpture of Ellora, possibly he would have changed his opinion.

A singer, a painter, a wonderful master of language and a poet, Vivekananda was a complete artist. A cursory glance at his handling of the word must detain us even in this venture of restricted scope.

7. EW p. 44.

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41

HIS POETRY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S poems are small in number and limited in scope, and it is not surprising that this aspect of his career has not received adequate treatment so far. All the same, this need not constitute a shy apology for penning a few words on his poems, for his poetry invites serious consideration not only as a facet of the working of a great mind, but for its own merit in its own field.

He composed poems in English, Bengali, Hindi and Sanskrit, and as published in a handy book by *Advaita Ashram*, Almora, they number twenty, eight, one and four respectively. Broadly speaking, the theme of all these poems is spiritual realization; different shades of this theme can however be discovered as we delve a little deeper. There is the simple but stirring autobiographical note summarizing the poet's quest for the truth, and the storms braved by him:

> For the sake of love, ev'n as one insane,
> I have often clutched at shadows lifeless;
> For religion, many creeds have I sought,
> Lived in mountain-caves, on cremation-grounds,
> By the Ganges and other sacred streams,
> And how many days have I passed on alms![1]

1. To a Friend.

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In *Who Knows How Mother Plays* ! the poet beautifully hints at the relation between thought and action, and between forms and events. The theme of innocent childhood being the unfailing repository of inner reality pervades this poem. It reminds us of Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* and Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*; though the essential features of the three poems are different, childhood recollections form the source of all the three:

> Perchance the child had glimpse
> Of shades, behind the scenes,
> With eager eyes and strained,
> Quivering forms—ready
> To jump in front and be
> Events, resistless, strong.

Several poems devote long stanzas to description of nature, but nature is conceived as the medium through which the final reality expresses itself, the book in which the universal unity is imprinted: *The song of the Free*, *Kali the Mother*, *Hold On yet A While*, *Brave Heart* are good examples. In the latter two poems nature is indeed conceived as an obstruction in the way of realizing one's divinity. *Angels Unawares* traces the history of religion; in some poems, notably in *To the Fourth of July*, the poet's urge for freedom is powerfully reflected; the awareness of the endless nature of the quest for God forms the theme of some other poems, like *My Play Is Done*.

Almost every line written by Vivekananda bears a strong imprint of the restless soul bound in the fetters of *maya* and struggling to be free. To this soul the worldly turmoil is inaudible; but the faint note coming from an unearthly horizon is instantly picked up by it; its feverish anxiety to retain that fleeting note is touching:

> Wake up that note ! the song that had its birth
> Far off, where worldly taint could never reach;
> In mountain caves, and glades of forest deep,
> Whose calm no sigh for lust or wealth or fame

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Could ever dare to break; where rolled the stream
Of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follows both.[2]

And the conquest of that mysterious note opens up the unfathomable vista of realization, the end of the quest. The only awareness that now remains is:

Before the sun, the moon, the earth,
Before the stars or comets free,
Before e'en Time has had its birth
I was, I am and I will be ![3]

Vivekananda's poetry is the poetry of realization of actual experience of communion with the ultimate reality that exists before birth and after death. This experience is too rich to fit in the conventional instrument of language:

It is joy that never spoke,
And grief unfelt, profound,
Immortal life unlived,
Eternal death unmourned.
. . . .
To it the tear-drop goes,
To spread the smiling form,
It is the Goal of life,
And Peace—its only home ![4]

The wonderful directness of this poetry, the absence of the slightest verbal wile, stem from the directness of the experience, and are therefore appealing. The state of *Samadhi*, the deepest merging of the soul into God, finds exquisite expression in *The Hymn of Samadhi*. The process of matter becoming rarer and rarer and merging into spirit, and mastering an empire of placid nothingness here assumes visual proportions:

2. **The Song of the Sannyasin,**
3. **The Song of the Free.**
4. **Peace.**

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In the void of mind involute, there floats
The fleeting universe, rises and floats,
Sinks again, ceaseless in the current 'I'.
. . . .
Lo ! Tis stopped, ev'n that current flows no more,
Void merged into void,—beyond speech and mind!
Whose heart understands, he verily does.

Nature animates his poetry in various ways. It is the steady ideal in the changing turmoil of this world; everything may fail, nature will not. In the lovely lyric, *To An Early Violet*, Vivekananda beautifully symbolizes in a violet this vision of nature:

What though if love itself doth fail,
Thy fragrance strewed in vain;
What though if bad o'er good prevail,
And vice o'er virtue reign:—
Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
Thou violet, sweet and pure,
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
Unasked, unstinted, sure !

In the beautiful song composed on the fourth of July 1898, and presented to his American disciples in commemoration of their national day, grandeur of nature and the urge for freedom ring in harmony. Indeed it was prophetic poetry, for four years later the same date 'shed liberty' on the poet. The pleasant morning of the fourth July comes with a noble message; Dame Nature is dressed in her loveliest to welcome this courier of liberty, she exhales freedom.

The flowers raise their star-like crowns,
Dew-set, and wave the welcome fair.
The lakes are opening wide in love
Their hundred-thousand lotus-eyes
To welcome thee, with all their depth.
All hail to thee; thou Lord of Light !
A welcome new to thee, today,
O Sun ! Today thou sheddest liberty !

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Sometimes nature teaches the poet. Nature here preaches the gospel of courage and patience; its endless cycles hold a redeeming promise. The following lines clothing this gospel are reminiscent of Shelley, greeting the West Wind:

> No winter was but summer came behind,
> Each hollow crests the wave,
> They push each other in light and shade;
> Be steady then and brave.[5]

The high-strung imagination of the poet is at its happiest tracing the quest for God in a sustained flight. It soars high in the spiritual realm and results in a perfect fusion of sublime thought and neat ennobling phrase.

> One bending low with load of life
> That meant no joy, but suffering harsh and hard,—
> And wending on his way through dark and dismal paths,
> Without a flash of light from brain or heart
> To give a moment's cheer, till the line
> That marks pain from pleasure, death from life,
> And good from what is evil, was well-nigh wiped from sight,—
> Saw, one blessed night, a faint but beautiful ray of light
> Descend to him. He knew not what or wherefrom,
> But called it God and worshipped.[6]

In poems like *My Play Is Done* the poet's heart full of a passionate longing pours forth in lavish strains. The fervent clinging of the child to the mother, the irresistible yearning to end search, the agony of separation, are all rolled into a touching rhapsody. Devoid of all vanity and ambition, man grows into a child and the wave returns to the main. All thought has vanished here, only feeling remains and reigns supreme. Listen to this dynamic wail:

5. Hold On Yet A While, Brave Heart.
6. Angels Unawares.

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Alas for me, I cannot rest. This floating bubble, earth—
Its holow form, its hollow name, its hollow death and birth—
For me is nothing. How I long to get beyond the crust
Of name and form ! Ah, open the gates: to me they open must.
Open the gates of light, O Mother, to me thy tired son.
I long, oh, long to return home ! Mother, my play is done.

In its pure impassioned poetic frenzy, this poem is unique. The anxious cry 'My play is done, O Mother, break my chains and make me free !' represents the highest ecstasy that Vivekananda's poem has attained. It is tragic at source but relieving in its revelation. This poem indicates the tremendous possibilities the sheer unconceited poetic passion Vivekananda was capable of.

The image-making power of Vivekananda's pen is admirable. His imagery does not stand apart; is serves the larger purpose of his poetry. The destructive image of *Kali* who switches on the engines of colossal havoc is horrible:

In the roaring, whirling wind
Are the souls of a million lunatics,—
Just loose from the prison house,—
Wrenching trees by the roots,
Sweeping all from the path.[7]

The message of renunciation finds a beautifully stirring expression through a metaphor:

Shattered be little self, hope, name and fame;
Set up a pyre of them, and make thy heart
A burning ground.[8]

The sustained pen-pictures of Vivekananda shine with a pristine, epic grandeur. Listen to the following description of an angel which recalls one of the angels in Milton's paradise:

7. Kali the Mother.
8. Let Shyama Dance There.

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One drunk with wine of wealth and power
And health to enjoy them both, whirled on
His maddening course,—till the earth, he thought,
Was made for him, his pleasure—garden, and man,
The crawling worm, was made to find him sport,
Till the thousand lights of joy,—with pleasure fed,
That flickered day and night before his eyes,
With constant change of colours,—began to blur
His sight, and cloy his senses; till selfishness,
Like a horny growth, had spread all o'er his heart;
. . . .
Then sorrow came,—and Wealth and Power went,—
. . . .
His lips would speak in grateful accents, 'O Blessed Misery!'[9]

Sometimes conventional images are pressed into service to elucidate philosophical concepts. In the following lines the concept of *maya* is clothed in such an image:

And mind its mantle, dreamy net,
Casts o'er them all and holds them fast.
In warp and woof of thought are set
Earth, hells and heavens, or worst or best.[10]

Most of the metres handled by Vivekananda are irregular and devoid of rhyme. The sense is supreme and dictates the soundpattern in a majority of the poems. Several poems have internal rhythm and are not only poetic but eminently musical. Especially his non-English poems can be sung to a charming effect. Composed by an enchanting singer, his poems have a catching melody to match their thrilling thought.

Yet, he shows himself capable of handling rhyme smoothly when he chooses to do so. Some of his attractive lyrics like

9. Angels Unawares.
10. The Song of the Free.

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Misunderstood, To An Early Violet, My Play Is Done, are composed in rhyme, and the effect is exquisite. Listen, for example, to the opening lines of *Misunderstood*:

In days of yore
On Ganga's shore, preaching,
A hoary priest was teaching—
How gods they come
As Sita Ram
And gentle Sita pining, weeping.

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42

HIS PROSE

VIVEKANANDA'S prose is preeminently the orator's prose. A formidable wielder of the weapon of word, he is a skilled master especially of the spoken word. Out of the five thousand pages of his complete works, less than a third is actually written to be published in book-form, the remaining constitute his lectures. Of this written portion quite some pages are occupied by the letters. Even in the writings, the orator always lurks from behind. The best indication of this are the armies of verbs in the imperative and the magic of the vocative in which he is a past-master. The use of Biblical pronouns, forceful vocatives and emphatic verbs which do not argue but state a conviction make his prose lofty. Hear his famous call in the *Upanishadic* style: "Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth-sinners?. . . . . Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep."

This is Vivekananda on the platform. In contrast with this, or rather as complementary to this, we have the monk in the family, chatting through his letters about household matters. Here he writes simple, delightful prose, clear, transparent words, with a gentle interest in things that should matter least—to a stern puritan monk. It is pleasant to see him diverting himself with anxiety about the household pets and with relief from that anxiety. The lively words ring with a human interest in life: "I have just now returned from lending a hand in cutting a deep

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drain to take off the water from the *Math* grounds. . . . . My huge stork is full of glee and so are the ducks and geese. My tame antelope fled from the *Math* and gave us some days of anxiety. One of my ducks unfortunately died yesterday. She had been gasping for breath more than a week. One of my waggish old monks says, 'Sir it is no use living in the *Kali Yuga* when ducks catch cold from damp and frogs sneeze.' One of the geese was losing her feathers. Knowing no other method of treatment, I left her some minutes in a tub of water mixed with a mild carbolic, so that it might either kill or heal; and she is all right now."[1]

The power of sustained description is amazingly developed in his prose; the vigorous, dynamic and direct descriptions reflect the dynamic personality behind them. His descriptions are vivid, luminous, throbbing with life, and pervaded with broad human sympathy. They are direct and sincere, without any conceit. The inner lining of humour lends them softness and makes them altogether charming. The details in his descriptions are apparently important and loaded with choicest adjectives, but towards the end they yield to the weird effect of the whole. *The East and the West* contains numerous specimens of such description. Describing the sluggish, dull state of the contemporary Indian, he says, "And mark you, those things which you see in pusillanimous, effeminate folk who speak in a nasal tone chewing every syllable, whose voice is as thin as of one who has been starving for a week, who are like a tattered wet rag, who never protest or are moved even if kicked by anybody—those are the signs of death, all corruption and stench."[2] The accounts of his first voyage to America are packed with amusing and penetrating descriptions. Here is, for instance, a vivid penpicture of a Chinese family on a boat: "The boatman lives in the boat with his family. Almost always the wife is at the helms, managing one with the hands and the other with one of his feet. And in ninety per cent of cases you find a baby tied to her back, with the hands and feet of the little Chin left free. It is a quaint sight to see the little John

1. LEW p. 717.
2. EW p. 15.

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China man dangling very quietly from his mother's back while she is now setting with might and main. . . . . or jumping with wonderful agility from boat to boat. . . . . Baby John is every moment in danger of having his little head pulverised, pigtail and all; but he does not care a fig. . . . . He is quite content to learn the anatomy of a bit of rice-cake given to him from time to time by the madly busy mother."[3] This delightful style easily claims for him the title 'Mark Twain of Bengal' suggested by his biographers.

Vivekananda's broad sense of humour enlivens his writings. He was an honest believer in intermittent merry-making for its own sake and whatever he believed in he practised. The gods of the Hindus are most of them smiling, fun-making gods, and the Hindu spiritual leaders are nothing if not smiling. When on the lookout for the light, funny side of things, Vivekananda tickles you almost to the ribs with some of his descriptions. Try the following dissertation on no less an important ritual than bath: "Spain and Italy are warm countries, but there bathing is still less! Imagine their eating garlic in abundance, profuse perspiration day and night, and yet no bath! Ghosts must surely run away from them, what to say of men! ..... A millionaire friend of mine once invited me to come over to Paris: Paris, which is the capital of modern civilisation—Paris, the heaven of luxury, fashion and merriment. My friend accommodated me in a huge palatial hotel, where arrangements for meals were in a right royal style; but, for bath-well, no name of it. Two days I suffered silently-till at last I could bear it no longer, and had to address my friend thus: Dear brother, let this royal luxury be with you and yours! I am panting to get out of this situation.....If it continues like this, I shall be in the imminent danger of turning mad like a rabid dog. .....Twelve of the chief hotels were seen, but no place for bathing was there in any of them. There are independent bathing houses, where one can go and have a bath for four or five rupees. Good heavens! That very afternoon I read in a paper, that an old lady entered into the bath-tub and died then and there. Whatever the doctors may say, I am

3. LEW p. 287.

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inclined to think that perhaps that was the first occasion in her life to come in contact with so much water, and the frame collapsed by the sudden shock!"[4]

Often with a word or two the spirit of genial humour is infused in his descriptions. Thus, he describes the wife of Napoleon III, as the universally recognized *Avatar* (incarnation) of fashion in the West.[5] Describing the emergence of the trader class he says, "And it so happened that a band of fellows who were very clever undertook to take these things from one place to another, and on the plea of remuneration for this, appropriated the major portion of their profit as their due."[6] He mentions a specialist with the words "He calls himself a mental healer of metaphysical—chemico—physico—religioso—what not!" Listen again to his rapturous description of a storm: "Yesterday there was a tremendous cyclone which gave a good 'treatment' to the tents. The big tent under which they had the lectures had developed so much spirituality, that it entirely disappeared from mortal gaze and about 200 chairs were dancing about the grounds under spiritual ecstasy."[7]

This genial, innocent humour was transformed into slashing sarcasm clothed in irony and ridicule when it was used as an instrument of criticism or attack. All varieties of sarcasm from the mild to the bitterly biting are found in his writings. To persons who never tired of saying meekly, "We are low, degraded, etc.," he taunts with an unexpected but affectionate verbal pinch, "Yes, that may be the truth, forsooth, because you profess to be truthful and we have no reason to disbelieve you; but why do you include the whole nation in that 'we'? Pray, sirs, what sort of good manners is that?"[8]

His sarcasm is always purposeful, and makes us conscious of the mind behind it replete with ideas and bits of minute observation. The upper classes in India was his special butt; he described them as 'walking corpses.' "Your houses, your furniture look like museum specimens, so lifeless and antiquated

4. EW p. 38-39.
5. EW p. 36.
6. CCS p. 2.
7. Lett. p. 113.
8. EW p. 7.

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they are; an eye-witness of your manners and customs is inclined to think that he is listening to a grandmother's tale! When, even after making a personal acquaintance with you, one returns home, one seems to think one had been to visit the paintings in an Art Gallery! In this world of *maya*, you are the real illusion, you the upper classes of India! You represent the past tense, with all its varieties of form jumbled into one."[9] While replying to the charge against the monk of keeping idle his faculty of propagating the race, his tone rings with energetic irony: "Then, of course, every faculty has been given to us by God for some use. Therefore, the monk is wrong in not propagating the race—a sinner. Well, so also have been given us faculties of anger, lust, cruelty, theft, robbery, cheating, etc., every one of these being absolutely necessary for the maintenance of social life, reformed or unreformed. What about these? Ought they also to be maintained at full steam, following the varied-experience-theory or not?"[10]

The sublime intensity of his spiritual passion often transformed his prose into poetry. Prose appears here to melt beautifully into poetry. These passages are generally autobiographical and form parts of his letters. The depth of the weird longing is here so intense that its onrush pushes aside his usual reticence about himself. Listen to his divine contentment: "For what am I, what was I ever but a tool in His hands, for whose service I have given up everything—my beloved ones, my joy, my life? He is my playful darling. I am His playfellow. There is neither rhyme nor reason in the Universe! What reason binds Him? He the Playful One is playing these tears and laughters over all parts of the play! Great fun, great fun, as Joe says!"[11] His serene longing for eternal rest soars in a wonderfully keen poetic flight: "I am glad, I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter Peace. I leave none bound; I take no bonds. Whether this body will fall and release me, or I enter into Freedom in the body-the old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again! . . . . . The

9. CCS p. 88.
10. Complete Works, Vol. IV. p. 252.
11. LEW p. 419.

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guide, the *Guru*, the leader, the teacher, has passed away; the boy, the student, the servant, is left behind."[12]

While voicing the inner urge of the soul his language soars in placid rhapsody; while creating the same urge in others, it assumes momentous force communicated either through verbs in the imperative mood or through questions. The following famous passage is an excellent specimen: "Feel from the heart. What is in the intellect or reason? It goes a few steps and stops. . . . . Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millons of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? . . . . . Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step."[13]

The power of vividly describing a scene and almost creating it before the mind is as much in evidence in his prose as in his verse. He uses metaphorical language with such intensity that one is not conscious of any artistic effect, one *feels* the process described by the metaphor; it assumes reality. Read, as a sample, the following well-known lines: "The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking, and a voice is coming to us, and behold, the sleeper is awakening!"[14] Here the reader or hearer, especially the latter, feels his identity with the 'sleeper,' and that is precisely the object of the speaker in elaborating the image. Bringing out the contrast between Indian teaching and that of the other nations, he says, "Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood; each idea had to wade through the blood of millions of our fellow beings; each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows."[15]

The tremendous effect of his power to create an image through word and gesture was experienced by the audience in one of his London lectures which is specially remembered for

12. LEW p. 670.
13. IHP p. 32.
14. IHP p. 18.
15. IHP p. 4.

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it. The topic he was speaking on was the potentiality of love. Speaking of the great possibilities of love, he said, "Suppose a tiger should suddenly appear before you in the streets. How terror-stricken you would be, and how eager you would be to fly away for your very lives! But" and here he paused, and continued, measuring every syllable and communicating the sense more through the hands and the eyes than through the words, "suppose, there were a baby in the path of the tiger! Where would your place be then? At the mouth of the tiger—my one of you—I am sure of it."[16] The words undoubtedly rang in the hall with telling effect.

'The Oriental hyperbole,' as he himself named it, was a predominant characteristic of Swami Vivekananda's whole life. In a letter to the Prince of Khetri he writes in 1894, "I have not words enough to express my gratitude to you. The Oriental hyperbole alone expresses the depth of Oriental gratitude: 'If the Indian Ocean were an inkstand, the highest mountain of the Himalayas the pen, the earth the scroll, and time itself the writer, still it will not express my gratitude to you!' " This tendency to stretch everything to the farthest limit is a source of great strength, it draws out the inner potentialities of the soul to the greatest effect. But if this hyperbole is transferred from the realm of feeling to that of fact it can lead to inaccuracies, and be disastrous. Vivekananda was himself aware of this danger, and kept away from it as far as possible. His warm sympathy and breadth of outlook are a fine witness to this. But, on some occasions, his hyperbolic style crossed over to the region of facts, and his argument suffered a setback. How quaint, for instance, it sounds when the sentence "that is the one and only cause of the degeneration of India" is immediately followed by the sentence "One of the causes which led to this degeneration was. . . . . ."[17] This is, of course, an

16. LEW. p. 377.

17. IHP. p. 21. I am aware that these two sentences may not have been uttered or written consecutively by the Swami himself as they appear on the page. If they were not, the responsibility of the quaint effect would be of the compiler of the *IHP*. Even then my argument stands, for to refer to a cause of something, admiting of many causes, as 'the one and only cause' points to the propensity to hyperbole.

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innocent case not leading to any dispute. The case in Detroit was however not such. After Vivekananda's talk in that city on the morals of India, a bishop wrote in a local paper to the effect that Vivekananda's statement that one could travel through the length and breadth of India without coming across a single drunken man was a lie. Everyone knows that such a statement is, on the face of it, but a sweeping overstatement. Those interested in the spirit of the statement and the speaker would certainly ignore its exaggerated content. Many in Detroit did not fail to do so. But the fact remains that the noble sentiment of patriotism is ill advised to evoke such superlatives in statements of fact.

This defect of style sinks into insignificance when one considers the grand, sublime general effect of Vivekananda's prose style. One almost thanks such defects which make it possible for us to claim such magnanimous prodigies to humanity. And finally, as the Sanskrit poet says, 'a defect of those of stainless mind is but lovely; the bitterness of saffron to which the sweet scents of the three worlds pay homage (by offering their essences) is only exceedingly sweet.'

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